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Alice Braddon

THE FATAL THREE

with the Author's love,

June 26th 1890.

A Novel

BY THE AUTHOR OF

LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," "VIXEN,"
"ISHMAEL," "MOHAWKS,"
ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES
VOL. I.

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BOOK THE FIRST.

CLOTHO; OR SPINNING THE THREAD.

CHAPTER I.

"WE HAVE BEEN SO HAPPY."

"I'm afraid she will be a terrible bore," said the lady, with a slight pettishness in the tone of a voice that was naturally sweet.

"How can she bore us, love? She is only a child, and you can do what you like with her," said the gentleman.

"My dear John, you have just admitted that she is between thirteen and fourteen—a great deal more than a child—a great overgrown girl, who will want to be taken about in the carriage, and to come down to the drawing-room, and who will be always in the way. Had she been a child of Mildred's age, and a playfellow for Mildred, I should not have objected half so much."

"I'm very sorry you object; but I have no doubt she will be a playfellow for Mildred all the same,

and that she will not mind spending a good deal of her life in the schoolroom."

"Evidently, John, you don't know what girls of fourteen are. I do."

"Naturally, Maud, since it is not so many years since you yourself were that age."

The lady smiled, touched ever so slightly by the suggestion of youth, which was gratifying to the mother of a seven-year-old daughter.

The scene was a large old-fashioned drawing-room, in an old-fashioned street in the very best quarter of the town, bounded on the west by Park Lane and on the east by Grosvenor Square. The lady was sitting at her own particular table, in her favourite window, in the summer gloaming; the gentleman was standing with his back to the velvet-draped mantelpiece. The room was full of flowers and prettinesses of every kind, and offered unmistakable evidence of artistic taste and large means in its possessors.

The lady was young and fair, a tall slip of a woman, who afforded a Court milliner the very best possible scaffolding for expensive gowns. The gen-

tleman was middle-aged and stout, with strongly-marked features and a resolute, straightforward expression. The lady was the daughter of an Irish peer; the gentleman was a commoner, whose fortune had been made in a great wholesale firm, which had still its mammoth warehouses near St. Paul's Churchyard, and its manufactory at Lyons, but with which John Fausset had no longer any connection. He had taken his capital out of the business, and had cleansed himself from the stain of commercial dealings before he married the Honourable Maud Donfrey, third daughter of Lord Castle-Connell.

Miss Donfrey had given herself very willingly to the commoner, albeit he was her senior by more than twenty years, and, in her own deprecating description of him, was quite out of her set. She liked him not a little for his own sake, and for the power his strong will exercised over her own weaker nature; but she liked him still better for the sake of wealth which seemed unlimited.

She was nineteen at the time of her marriage, and she had been married nine years. Those years had brought the Honourable Mrs. Fausset only one

child, the seven-year-old daughter playing about the room in the twilight; and maternity had offered very little hindrance to the lady's pleasures as a woman of fashion. She had been indulged to the uttermost by a fond and admiring husband; and now for the first time in his life John Fausset had occasion to ask his wife a favour, which was not granted too readily. It must be owned that the favour was not a small one, involving nothing less than the adoption of an orphan girl in whose fate Mr. Fausset was interested.

"It is very dreadful," sighed Mrs. Fausset, as if she were speaking of an earthquake. "We have been so happy alone together—you and I and Mildred."

"Yes, dearest, when we have been alone, which, you will admit, has not been very often."

"O, but visitors do not count. They come and go. They don't belong to us. This dreadful girl will be one of us; or she will expect to be. I feel as if the golden circle of home-life were going to be broken."

"Not broken, Maud, only expanded."

"O, but you can't expand it by letting in a

stranger. Had the mother no people of her own; no surroundings whatever; nobody but you who could be appealed to for this wretched girl?" inquired Mrs. Fausset, fanning herself wearily, as she lolled back in her low chair.

She wore a loose cream-coloured gown, of softest silk and Indian embroidery, and there were diamond stars trembling amongst her feathery golden hair. The flowing garment in which she had dined alone with her husband was to be changed presently for white satin and old Mechlin lace, in which she was to appear at three evening parties; but in the meantime, having for once in a way dined at home, she considered her mode of life intensely domestic.

The seven-year-old daughter was roaming about with her doll, sometimes in one drawing-room, sometimes in another. There were three, opening into each other, the innermost room half conservatory, shadowy with palms and tropical ferns. Mildred was enjoying herself in the quiet way of children accustomed to play alone, looking at the pretty things upon the various tables, peering in at the old china figures in the cabinets—the ridiculous Chelsea

shepherd and shepherdess; the Chelsea lady in hawking costume, with a falcon upon her wrist; the absurb lambs, and more absurd foliage; and the Bow and Battersea ladies and gentlemen, with their blunt features and coarse complexions. Mildred was quite happy, prowling about and looking at things in silent wonder; turning over the leaves of illustrated books, and lifting the lids of gold and enamelled boxes; trying to find out the uses and meanings of things. Sometimes she came back to the front drawing-room, and seated herself on a stool at her mother's feet, solemnly listening to the conversation, following it much more earnestly, and comprehending it much better, than either her father or mother would have supposed possible.

To stop up after nine o'clock was an unwonted joy for Mildred, who went to bed ordinarily at seven. The privilege had been granted in honour of the rare occasion—a *tête-à-tête* dinner in the height of the London season.

"Is there no one else who could take her?" repeated Mrs. Fausset impatiently, finding her husband slow to answer.

"There is really no one else upon whom the poor child has any claim."

"Cannot she remain at school? You could pay for her schooling, of course. I should not mind that."

This was generous in a lady who had brought her husband a nominal five thousand pounds, and who spent his money as freely as if it had been water.

"She cannot remain at school. She is a kind of girl who cannot get on at school. She needs home influences."

"You mean that she is a horrid rebellious girl who has been expelled from a school, and whom I am to take because nobody else will have her."

"You are unjust and ungenerous, Maud. The girl has not been expelled. She is a girl of peculiar temper, and very strong feelings, and she is unhappy amidst the icy formalties of an unexceptionable school. Perhaps had she been sent to some struggling schoolmistress in a small way of business she might have been happier. At any rate, she is not happy, and as her people were friends of mine in

the past I should like to make her girlhood happy, and to see her well married, if I can."

"But are there not plenty of other people in the world who would do all you want if you paid them. I'm sure I should not grudge the money."

"It is not a question of money. The girl has money of her own. She is an heiress."

"Then she is a ward in Chancery, I suppose?"

"No, she is my ward. I am her sole trustee."

"And you really want to have her here in our own house, and at The Hook, too, I suppose. Always with us wherever we go."

"That is what I want—until she marries. She will be twenty in five years, and in all probability she will marry before she is twenty. It is not a life-long sacrifice that I am asking from you, Maud; and, remember, it is the first favour I have ever asked you."

"Let the little girl come, mother," pleaded Mildred, clambering on to her mother's knee.

She had been sitting with her head bent over her doll, and her hair falling forward over her face like golden rain, for the last ten minutes. Mrs.

Fausset had no suspicion that the child had been listening, and this sudden appeal was startling to the last degree.

"Wisdom has spoken from my darling's rosy lips," said Fausset, coming over to the window and stooping to kiss his child.

"My dear John, you must know that your wish is a law to me," replied his wife, submitting all at once to the inevitable. "If you are really bent upon having your ward here she must come."

"I am really bent upon it."

"Then let her come as soon as you like."

"I will bring her to-morrow."

"And I shall have some one to play with," said Mildred, in her baby voice; "I shall give her my second best doll."

"Not your best, Mildred?" asked the father, smiling at her.

Mildred reflected for a few moments.

"I'll wait and see what she is like," she said, "and if she is very nice I will give her quite my best doll. The one you brought me from Paris, father. The one that walks and talks."

Maud Fausset sighed, and looked at the little watch dangling on her chatelaine.

"A quarter to ten! How awfully late for Mildred to be up! And it is time I dressed. I hope you are coming with me, John. Ring the bell, please. Come, Mildred."

The child kissed her father with a hearty, clinging kiss which meant a world of love, and then she picked up her doll—not the walking-talking machine from Paris, but a friendly, old-fashioned wax and bran personage—and trotted out of the room, hanging on to her mother's gown.

"How sweet she is!" muttered the father, looking after her fondly; "and what a happy home it has been! I hope the coming of that other one won't make any difference."

CHAPTER II.

FAY.

Mrs. Fausset's three parties, the last of which was a very smart ball, kept her away from home until the summer sun was rising above Grosvenor Square, and the cocks were crowing in the mews behind Upper Parchment Street. Having been so late in the morning, Mrs. Fausset ignored breakfast, and only made her appearance in time for lunch, when her husband came in from his ride. He had escorted her to the first of her parties, and had left her on the way to the second, to go and finish his evening in the House, which he found much more interesting than society.

They met at luncheon, and talked of their previous night's experiences, and of indifferent matters. Not a word about the expected presence which was so soon to disturb their domestic calm. Mr. Fausset affected cheerfulness, yet was evidently out of spirits.

He looked round the picturesque old oak dining-room wistfully; he strolled into the inner room, with its dwarf bookcases, pictures, and bronzes, its cosy corner behind a sixfold Indian screen, a century-old screen, bought at Christie's out of a famous collection. He surveyed this temple of domestic peace, and wondered within himself whether it would be quite as peaceful when a new presence was among them.

"Surely a girl of fourteen can make no difference," he argued, "even if she has a peculiar temper. If she is inclined to be troublesome, she shall be made to keep herself to herself. Maud shall not be rendered unhappy by her."

He went out soon after lunch, and came home again at afternoon tea-time in a hansom, with a girl in a black frock. A four-wheeler followed, with a large trunk and two smaller boxes. The splendid creatures in knee-breeches and powder who opened the door had been ordered to deny their mistress to everybody, so Mrs. Fausset was taking tea alone in her morning-room.

The morning-room occupied the whole front of

the second floor, a beautiful room with three windows, the centre a large bow jutting out over empty space. This bow-window had been added when Mr. Fausset married, on a suggestion from his *fiancée*. It spoiled the external appearance of the house, but it made the room delightful. For furniture and decoration there was everything pretty, novel, eccentric, and expensive that Maud Fausset had ever been able to think of. She had only stopped her caprices and her purchases when the room would not hold another thing of beauty. There was a confusion of form and colour, but the general effect was charming; and Mrs. Fausset, in a loose white muslin gown, suited the room, just as the room suited Mrs. Fausset.

She was sitting in the bow-window, in a semicircle of flowers and amidst the noises of the West End world, waiting for her husband and the newcomer, nervous and apprehensive. The scarlet Japanese tea-table stood untouched, the water bubbling in the quaint little bronze tea-kettle, swinging between a pair of rampant dragons.

She started as the door opened, but kept her

seat. She did not want to spoil the new-comer by an undue appearance of interest.

John Fausset came into the room, leading a pale girl dressed in black. She was tall for her age, and very thin, and her small face had a pinched look, which made the great black eyes look larger. She was a peculiar-looking girl, with an olive tint in her complexion which hinted at a lineage not altogether English. She was badly dressed in the best materials, and had a look of never having been much cared for since she was born.

"This is Fay," said Mr. Fausset, trying to be cheerful.

His wife held out her hand, which the girl took coldly, but not shyly. She had an air of being perfectly self-possessed.

"Her name is Fay, is it? What a pretty name! By the bye, you did not tell me her surname."

"Did I not? Her name is Fausset. She is a distant relation of my family."

"I did not understand that last night," said Mrs. Fausset, with a puzzled air. "You only talked of a friend."

"Was that so? I should have said a family connection. Yes, Fay and I are namesakes, and kindred."

He patted the girl's shoulder caressingly, and made her sit down by the little red table in front of the tea-cups, and cakes, and buns. The buns reminded him of his daughter.

"Where is Mildred?"

"She is at her music-lesson; but she will be here in a minute or two, no doubt," answered his wife.

"Poor little mite, to have to begin lessons so soon; the chubby little fingers stuck down upon the cold hard keys. The piano is so uninviting at seven years old; such a world of labour for such a small effect. If she could turn a barrel-organ, with a monkey on the top, I'm sure she would like music ever so much better; and after a year or two of grinding it would dawn upon her that there was something wanting in that kind of music, and then she would attack the piano of her own accord, and its difficulties would not seem so hopelessly uninteresting. Are you fond of lessons, Fay?"

"I hate them," answered the girl, with vindictive emphasis.

"And I suppose you hate books too?" said Mrs. Fausset, rather scornfully.

"No, I love books."

She looked about the spacious room, curiously, with admiring eyes. People who came from very pretty rooms of their own were lost in admiration at Mrs. Fausset's morning-room, with its heterogeneous styles of art — here Louis Seize, there Japanese; Italian on one side, Indian on the other. What a dazzling effect, then, it must needs have upon this girl, who had spent the last five years of her life amidst the barren surroundings of a suburban school!

"What a pretty room!" she exclaimed at last.

"Don't you think my wife was made to live in pretty rooms?" asked Fausset, touching Maud's delicate hand as it moved among the tea-things.

"She is very pretty herself," said Fay, bluntly.

"Yes, and all things about her should be pretty. This thing, for instance," as Mildred came bounding into the room, and clambered on her father's knee.

"This is my daughter, Fay, and your playfellow, if you know how to play."

"I'm afraid I don't, for they always snubbed us for anything like play," answered the stranger, "but Mildred shall teach me, if she will."

She had learnt the child's name from Mr. Fausset during the drive from Streatham Common to Upper Parchment Street.

Mildred stretched out her little hand to the girl in black with somewhat of a patronising air. She had lived all her little life among bright colours and beautiful objects, in a kind of butterfly world; and she concluded that this pale girl in sombre raiment must needs be poor and unhappy. She looked her prettiest, smiling down at the stranger from her father's shoulder, where she hung fondly. She looked like a cherub in a picture by Rubens, red-lipped, with eyes of azure, and flaxen hair just touched with gold, and a complexion of dazzling lily and carnation-colour suffused with light.

"I mean to give you my very best doll," she said.

"You darling, how I shall adore you!" cried the

strange girl impulsively, rising from her seat at the tea-table, and clasping Mildred in her arms.

"That is as it should be," said Fausset, patting Fay's shoulder affectionately. "Let there be a bond of love between you two."

"And will you play with me, and learn your lessons with me, and sleep in my room?" asked Mildred coaxingly.

"No, darling. Fay will have a room of her own," said Mrs. Fausset, replying to the last inquiry. "It is much nicer for girls to have rooms to themselves."

"No, it isn't," answered Mildred, with a touch of petulance that was pretty in so lovely a child. "I want Fay to sleep with me. I want her to tell me stories every night."

"You have mother to tell you stories, Mildred," said Mrs. Fausset, already inclined to be jealous.

"Not very often. Mother goes to parties almost every night."

"Not at The Hook, love."

"O, but at The Hook there's always com-

pany. Why can't I have Fay to tell me stories every night?" urged the child persistently.

"I don't see why they should not be together, Maud," said Mr. Fausset, always prone to indulge Mildred's lightest whim.

"It is better that Fay should have a room of her own, for a great many reasons," replied his wife, with a look of displeasure.

"Very well, Maud, so be it," he answered, evidently desiring to conciliate her. "And which room is Fay to have?"

"I have given her Bell's room."

Mr. Fausset's countenance fell.

"Bell's room—a servant's room!"—he repeated blankly.

"It is very inconvenient for Bell, of course," said Mrs. Fausset. "She will have to put up with an extra bed in the housemaid's room; and as she has always been used to a room of her own, she made herself rather disagreeable about the change."

Mr. Fausset was silent, and seemed thoughtful. Mildred had pulled Fay away from the table and led

her to a distant window, where a pair of Virginian love-birds were twittering in their gilded cage, half hidden amidst the bank of feathery white spirea and yellow marguerites which filled the recess.

"I should like to see the room," said Fausset presently, when his wife had put down her teacup.

"My dear John, why should you trouble yourself about such a detail?"

"I want to do my duty to the girl—if I can."

"I think you might trust such a small matter to *me*, or even to my housekeeper," Maud Fausset answered with an offended air. "However, you are quite at liberty to make a personal inspection. Bell is very particular, and any room she occupied is sure to be nice. But you can judge for yourself. The room is on the same floor as Mildred's."

This last remark implied that to occupy any apartment on that floor must be a privilege.

"But not with the same aspect."

"Isn't it? No, I suppose not. The windows look the other way," said Mrs. Fausset innocently.

She was not an over-educated person. She adored Keats, Shelley, and Browning, and talked

about them learnedly in a way; but she hardly knew the points of the compass.

She sauntered out of the room, a picture of languid elegance in her flowing muslin gown. There were flowers on the landing, and a scarlet Japanese screen to fence off the stairs that went downward, and a blue-and-gold Algerian curtain to hide the upward flight. This second floor was Mrs. Fausset's particular domain. Her bedroom and bathroom and dressing-room were all on this floor. Mr. Fausset lived there also, but seemed to be there on sufferance.

She pulled aside the Algerian curtain, and they went up to the third story. The two front rooms were Mildred's bedroom and schoolroom. The bedroom-door was open, revealing an airy room with two windows brightened by outside flower-boxes, full of gaudy red geraniums and snow-white marguerites, a gay-looking room, with a pale blue paper and a blue-and-cream-colour carpet. A little brass bed, with lace curtains, for Mildred—an iron bed, without curtains, for Mildred's maid.

The house was like many old London houses,

more spacious than it looked outside. There were four or five small rooms at the back occupied by servants, and it was one of those rooms—a very small room looking into a mews—which Mr. Fausset went to inspect.

It was not a delightful room. There was an outside wall at right-angles with the one window which shut off the glory of the westering sun. There was a forest of chimney-pots by way of prospect. There was not even a flower-box to redeem the dinginess of the outlook. The furniture was neat, and the room was spotlessly clean; but as much might be said of a cell in Portland Prison. A narrow iron bedstead, a couple of cane chairs, a common mahogany chest of drawers in the window, and on the chest of drawers a white toilet-cover and a small mahogany looking-glass; a deal washstand and a zinc bath. These are not luxurious surroundings; and Mr. Fausset's countenance did not express approval.

"I'm sure it is quite as nice a room as she would have at any boarding-school," said his wife, answering that disapproving look.

"Perhaps; but I want her to feel as if she were not at school, but at home."

"She can have a prettier room at The Hook, I daresay, though we are short of bedrooms even there —if she is to go to The Hook with us."

"Why, of course she is to go with us. She is to live with us till she marries."

Mrs. Fausset sighed, and looked profoundly melancholy.

"I don't think we shall get her married very easily," she said.

"Why not?" asked her husband quickly, looking at her anxiously as he spoke.

"She is so remarkably plain."

"Did she strike you so? I think her rather pretty, or at least interesting. She has magnificent eyes."

"So has an owl in an ivy-bush," exclaimed Mrs. Fausset petulantly. "Those great black eyes in that small pale face are positively repulsive. However, I don't want to depreciate her. She is of your kith and kin, and you are interested in her;

so we must do the best we can. I only hope Mildred will get on with her."

This conversation took place upon the stairs. Mr. Fausset was at the morning-room door by this time. He opened it, and saw his daughter in the sunlit window among the flowers, with her arm round Fay's neck.

"They have begun very well," he said.

"Children are so capricious," answered his wife.

CHAPTER III.

A SUPERIOR PERSON.

Mildred and her father's ward got on remarkably well—perhaps a little too well to please Mrs. Fausset, who had been jealous of the new-comer, and resentful of her intrusion from the outset. Mildred did not show herself capricious in her treatment of her playfellow. The child had never had a young companion before, and to her the advent of Fay meant the beginning of a brighter life. Until Fay came there had been no one but mother; and mother spent the greater part of her life in visiting and receiving visits. Only the briefest intervals between a ceaseless round of gaieties could be afforded to Mildred. Her mother doated on her, or thought she did; but she had allowed herself to be caught in the cogs of the great society wheel, and she was obliged to go round with the wheel. So far as brightly-furnished rooms and an expensive

morning governess, ever so much too clever for the pupil's requirements, and costly toys and pretty frocks and carriage-drives, could go, Mildred was a child in an earthly paradise; but there are some children who yearn for something more than luxurious surroundings and fine clothes, and Mildred Fausset was one of those. She wanted a great deal of love—she wanted love always; not in brief snatches, as her mother gave it—hurried caresses given in the midst of dressing for a ball, hasty kisses before stepping into her carriage to be whisked off to a garden-party, or in all the pomp and splendour of ostrich feathers, diamonds, and court-train before the solemn function of a Drawing-room. Such passing glimpses of love were not enough for Mildred. She wanted warm affections interwoven with the fabric of her life; she wanted loving companionship from morning till night; and this she had from Fay. From the first moment of their clasping hands the two girls had loved each other. Each sorely in need of love, they had come together naturally, and with all the force of free undisciplined nature, meeting and mingling like two rivers.

John Fausset saw their affection, and was delighted. That loving union between the girl and the child seemed to solve all difficulties. Fay was no longer a stranger. She was a part of the family, merged in the golden circle of domestic love. Mrs. Fausset looked on with jaundiced eye.

"If one could only believe it were genuine!" she sighed.

"Genuine! which of them do you suppose is pretending? Not Mildred, surely?"

"Mildred! No, indeed. *She* is truth itself."

"Why do you suspect Fay of falsehood?"

"My dear John, I fear—I only say I fear—that your *protégée* is sly. She has a quiet self-contained air that I don't like in one so young."

"I don't wonder she is self-contained. You do so little to draw her out."

"Her attachment to Mildred has an exaggerated air—as if she wanted to curry favour with us by pretending to be fond of our child," said Mrs. Fausset, ignoring her husband's remark.

"Why should she curry favour? She is not here as a dependent—though she is made to wear

the look of one sometimes more than I like. I have told you that her future is provided for; and as for pretending to be fond of Mildred, she is the last girl to pretend affection. She would have been better liked at school if she had been capable of pretending. There is a wild, undisciplined nature under that self-contained air you talk about."

"There is a very bad temper, if that is what you mean. Bell has complained to me more than once on that subject."

"I hope you have not set Bell in authority over her," exclaimed Mr. Fausset hastily.

"There must be some one to maintain order when Miss Colville is away."

"That some one should be you or I, not Bell."

"Bell is a conscientious person, and she would make no improper use of authority."

"She is a very disagreeable person. That is all I know about her," retorted Mr. Fausset, as he left the room.

He was dissatisfied with Fay's position in the house, yet hardly knew how to complain or what alteration to suggest. There were no positive wrongs

to resent. Fay shared Mildred's studies and amusements; they had their meals together, and took their airings together.

When Mildred went down to the morning-room or the drawing-room Fay generally went with her—generally, not always. There were times when Bell looked in at the schoolroom-door and beckoned Mildred. "Mamma wants you alone," she would whisper on the threshold; and Mildred ran off to be petted and paraded before some privileged visitor.

There were differences which Fay felt keenly, and inwardly resented. She was allowed to sit aloof when the drawing-room was full of fine ladies, upon Mrs. Fausset's afternoon; while Mildred was brought into notice and talked about, her little graces exhibited and expatiated upon, or her childish tastes conciliated. Fay would sit looking at one of the art-books piled upon a side-table, or turning over photographs and prints in a portfolio. She never talked unless spoken to, or did anything to put herself forward.

Sometimes an officious visitor would notice her.

"What a clever-looking girl! Who is she?"

asked a prosperous dowager, whose own daughters were all planted out in life, happy wives and mothers, and who could afford to interest herself in stray members of the human race.

"She is a ward of my husband's, Miss Fausset."

"Indeed! A cousin, I suppose?"

"Hardly so near as that. A distant connection."

Mrs. Fausset's tone expressed a wish not to be bored by praise of the clever-looking girl. People soon perceived that Miss Fausset was to be taken no more notice of than a piece of furniture. She was there for some reason known to Mr. and Mrs. Fausset, but she was not there because she was wanted—except by Mildred. Everybody could see that Mildred wanted her. Mildred would run to her as she sat apart, and clamber on her knee, and hang upon her, and whisper and giggle with her, and warm the statue into life. Mildred would carry her tea and cakes, and make a loving fuss about her in spite of all the world.

Bell was a power in the house in Upper Parch-

ment Street. She was that kind of old servant who is as bad as a mother-in-law, or even worse; for your mother-in-law is a lady by breeding and education, and is in somewise governed by reason, while your trustworthy old servant is apt to be a creature of impulse, influenced only by feeling. Bell was a woman of strong feelings, devotedly attached to Mrs. Fausset.

Twenty-seven years ago, when Maud Donfrey was an infant, Martha Bell was the young wife of the head-gardener at Castle-Connell. The gardener and his wife lived at one of the lodges near the bank of the Shannon, and were altogether superior people for their class. Martha had been a lace-maker at Limerick, and was fairly educated. Patrick Bell was less refined, and had no ideas beyond his garden; but he was honest, sober, and thoroughly respectable. He seldom read the newspapers, and had never heard of Home Rule or the three F.s.

Their first child died within three weeks of its birth, and a wet-nurse being wanted at the great house for Lady Castle-Connell's seventh baby, Mrs. Bell was chosen as altogether the best person for

that confidential office. She went to live at the great white house in the beautiful gardens near the river. It was only a temporary separation, she told Patrick; and Patrick took courage at the thought that his wife would return to him as soon as Lady Castle-Connell's daughter was weaned, while in the meantime he was to enjoy the privilege of seeing her every Sunday afternoon; but somehow it happened that Martha Bell never went back to the commonly-furnished little rooms in the lodge, or to the coarse-handed husband.

Martha Bell was a woman of strong feelings. She grieved passionately for her dead baby, and she took the stranger's child reluctantly to her aching breast. But babies have a way of getting themselves loved, and one baby will creep into the place of another unawares. Before Mrs. Bell had been at the great house three months she idolised her nursling. By the time she had been there a year she felt that life would be unbearable without her foster-child. Fortunately for her, she seemed as necessary to the child as the child was to her. Maud was delicate, fragile, lovely, and evanescent of aspect.

Lady Castle-Connell had lost two out of her brood, partly, she feared, from carelessness in the nursery. Bell was devoted to her charge, and Bell was entreated to remain for a year or two at least.

Bell consented to remain for a year; she became accustomed to the comforts and refinements of a nobleman's house; she hated the lodge, and she cared very little for her husband. It was a relief to her when Patrick Bell sickened of his desolate home, and took it into his head to emigrate to Canada, where he had brothers and sisters settled already. He and his wife parted in the friendliest spirit, with some ideas of reunion years hence, when the Honourable Maud should have outgrown the need of a nurse; but the husband died in Canada before the wife had made up her mind to join him there. Mrs. Bell lived at the great white house until Maud Donfrey left Castle-Connell as the bride of John Fausset. She went before her mistress to the house in Upper Parchment Street, and was there when the husband and wife arrived after their Continental honeymoon. From that hour she remained in possession at The Hook, Surrey, or at Upper Parchment

Street, or at any temporary abode by sea or lake. Bell was always a power in Mrs. Fausset's life, ruling over the other servants, dictating and fault-finding in a quiet, respectful way, discovering the weak side of everybody's character, and getting to the bottom of everybody's history. The servants hated her, and bowed down before her. Mrs. Fausset was fond of her as a part of her own childhood, remembering that great love which had watched through all her infantine illnesses and delighted in all her childish joys. Yet, even despite these fond associations, there were times when Maud Fausset thought that it would be a good thing if dear old Bell would accept a liberal pension and go and live in some rose and honeysuckle cottage among the summery meadows by the Thames. Mrs. Fausset had only seen that riverside region in summer, and she had hardly realised the stern fact of winter in that district. She never thought of rheumatism in connection with one of those low white-walled cottages, half-hidden under overhanging thatched gables, and curtained with woodbine and passion-flower, rose and myrtle. Dear old Bell was forty-

eight, straight as a ramrod, very thin, with sharp features, and eager gray eyes under bushy iron-gray brows. She had thick iron-gray hair, and she never wore a cap; that was one of her privileges, and a mark of demarcation between her and the other servants—that and her afternoon gown of black silk or satin.

She had no specific duties in the house, but had something to say about everything. Mrs. Fausset's French maid and Mildred's German maid were at one in their detestation of Bell; but both were eminently civil to that authority.

From the hour of Fay's advent in Upper Parchment Street, Bell had set her face against her. In the first place, she had not been taken into Mr. and Mrs. Fausset's confidence about the girl. She had not been consulted or appealed to in any way; and, in the second place, she had been told that her bedroom would be wanted for the new-comer, and that she must henceforward share a room with one of the housemaids, an indignity which this superior person keenly felt.

Nor did Fay do anything to conciliate this domestic

power. Fay disliked Bell as heartily as Bell disliked Fay. She refused all offers of service from the confidential servant at the outset, and when Bell wanted to help in unpacking her boxes—perhaps with some idea of peering into those details of a girl's possessions which in themselves constitute a history—Fay declined her help curtly, and shut the door in her face.

Bell had sounded her mistress, but had obtained the scantiest information from that source. A distant connection of Mr. Fausset's—his ward, an heiress. Not one detail beyond this could Bell extract from her mistress, who had never kept a secret from her. Evidently Mrs. Fausset knew no more.

"I must say, ma'am, that for an heiress the child has been sadly neglected," said Bell. "Her under-linen was all at sixes and sevens till *I* took it in hand; and she came to this house with her left boot worn down at heel. Her drawers are stuffed with clothes, but many of them are out of repair; and she is such a wilful young lady that she will hardly let *me* touch her things."

Bell had a habit of emphasising personal pronouns that referred to herself.

"You must do whatever you think proper about her clothes, whether she likes it or not," answered Mrs. Fausset, standing before her glass, and giving final touches to the feathery golden hair which her maid had arranged a few minutes before. "If she wants new things, you can buy them for her from any of my tradespeople. Mr. Fausset says she is to be looked after in every way. You had better not go to Bond Street for her under-linen. Oxford Street will do; and you need not go to Stephanie for her hats. She is such a very plain girl that it would be absurd—cruel even—to dress her like Mildred."

"Yes, indeed, it would, ma'am," assented Bell; and then she pursued musingly: "If it was a good school she was at, all I can say is that the wardrobe-woman was a very queer person to send any pupil away with her linen in such a neglected state. And as for her education, Miss Colville says she is shockingly backward. Miss Mildred knows more

geography and more grammar than that great overgrown girl of fourteen."

Mrs. Fausset sighed.

"Yes, Bell, she has evidently been neglected; but her education matters very little. It is her disposition I am anxious about."

"Ah, ma'am, and so am *I*," sighed Bell.

When Bell had withdrawn, Maud Fausset sat in front of her dressing-table in a reverie. She forgot to put on her bonnet or to ring for her maid, though she had been told the carriage was waiting, and although she was due at a musical recital in ten minutes. She sat there lost in thought, while the horses jingled their bits impatiently in the street below.

"Yes, there is a mystery," she said to herself; "everybody sees it, even Bell."

CHAPTER IV.

ALL SHE COULD REMEMBER.

The London season was waning, and fewer carriages rolled westward to the Park gates in the low sunlight of late afternoon, and fewer riders trotted eastward towards Grosvenor Square in the brighter sunshine before luncheon. Town was gay still; but the flood-tide of pleasure was over. The river of London life was on the ebb, and people were beginning to talk about grouse-moors in Scotland and sulphur-springs in Germany.

Fay had lived in Upper Parchment Street nearly two months. It seemed to her impatient spirit as if she had lived there half a lifetime. The life would have been hateful to her without Mildred's love. That made amends for a good deal, but it could not make amends for everything; not for Bell's quiet insolence, for instance.

Bell had replenished the alien's wardrobe.

Everything she had bought was of excellent quality, and expensive after its kind; but had a prize been offered for bad taste, Bell would have taken it by her selections of raiment on this occasion. Not once did she allow Fay to have a voice in the matter.

"Mrs. Fausset deputed *me* to choose the things, miss," she said, "and I hope *I* know my duty."

"I suppose I *am* very ugly," said Fay resignedly, as she contemplated her small features in the glass, overshadowed by a mushroom hat of coarse brown straw, with a big brown bow, "but in this hat I look positively hideous."

The hat was an excellent hat: that good coarse Dunstable, which costs money and wears for ever, the ribbon of the best quality; but Hebe herself would have looked plain under a hat shaped like a bell-glass.

Fay's remark was recorded to Mrs. Fausset as the indication of a discontented spirit.

Not being able to learn anything about Fay's history from her mistress, Bell had tried to obtain a little light from the girl herself, but without avail.

Questioned about her school, Fay had replied that she hated her school, and didn't want to talk of it. Questioned about her mother, she answered that her mother's name was too sacred to be spoken about to a stranger; and on a subtle attempt to obtain information about her father, the girl flushed crimson, started up angrily from her chair, and told the highly respectable Bell that she was not in the habit of chattering to servants, or being questioned by them.

After this it was war to the knife on Martha Bell's part.

Miss Colville, the expensive morning governess, was in somewise above prejudice, and was a person of liberal mind, allowing for the fact that she had lived all her life in other people's houses, looking on at lives of fashionable frivolity in which she had no share, and had been obliged to study Debrett's annual volume as if it were her Bible, lest she should commit herself in every other speech, so intricate are the ramifications and intermarriages of the Upper Ten Thousand. Miss Colville was not unkind to Fay Fausset, and was conscientious in

her instructions; but even she resented the mystery of the girl's existence, and felt that her presence blemished the respectability of the household. By and by, when she should be seeking new employment, and should have occasion to refer to Mrs. Fausset, and to talk of her pupils in Upper Parchment Street, there would be a difficulty in accounting for Fay. A ward of Mr. Fausset's, a distant connection: the whole thing sounded improbable. An heiress who had come to the house with torn embroidery upon her under-linen. A mystery—yes, no doubt a mystery. And in Miss Colville's ultra-particular phase of life no manner of mystery was considered respectable; except always those open secrets in the very highest circles which society agrees to ignore.

In spite of these drawbacks, Miss Colville was fairly kind to her new charge. Fay was backward in grammar and geography; she was a dullard about science; but she could chatter French, she knew a little Italian, and in music she was highly gifted. In this she resembled Mildred, who adored music, and had taken her first lessons on the piano as a

water-fowl takes to a pond, joyously, as to her native element. Fay was not advanced in the *technique* of the art, but she played and sang charmingly, for the most part by ear; and she used to play and sing to Mildred in the summer twilight, till Bell came like a prison-warder and insisted upon Mildred's going to bed.

"I nursed your mamma, miss," she would say, "and *I* never allowed her to spoil her complexion with late hours as Miss Fay is leading you on to do."

At seven Mildred cared neither for health nor complexion in the abstract, and she loved Fay's music and Fay's stories. Fay would tell her a fairy tale, with musical accompaniments, improvised to suit the story. This was Beauty's father groping through the dark wood. Then came the swaying of branches, the rustling of summer leaves, the long, long sigh of the night wind, the hoot of the owl, and the roll of distant thunder. Here came Fatima's brothers to the rescue, with a triumphant march, and the trampling of fiery steeds, careering up and down the piano in presto arpeggios, bursting open

the gates of Bluebeard's Castle with a fortissimo volley of chords.

"*I* never heard any one make such a noise on a piano," said Bell, bristling with indignation.

At eight o'clock Fay's day and evening were done. Mildred vanished like the setting of the sun. She would like to have had Fay to sit beside her bed and tell her stories, and talk to her, till she dropped to sleep; but this happiness was sternly interdicted by Bell.

"She would keep you awake half the night, Miss Mildred, over-exciting you with her stories; and what would your pa and the doctors say to *me*?" exclaimed Bell.

The door of the bright, pretty bedchamber closed upon Mildred, and Fay went back to the schoolroom heavy of heart, to enjoy the privilege of sitting up by herself till half-past nine, a privilege conceded to superior years. In that dismal hour and a half the girl had leisure to contemplate the solitude of her friendless life. Take Mildred from her, and she had no one—nothing. Mr. Fausset had meant to be kind to her, perhaps. He had talked very kindly

to her in the long drive from Streatham. He had promised her a home and the love of kindred; but evil influences had come in his way, and he had given her—Bell. Perhaps she was of a jealous, exacting disposition; for, fondly as she loved Mildred, she could not help comparing Mildred's lot with her own: Mildred's bright, airy room and flower-decked windows, looking over the tree-tops in the Park, with her dingy cell opening upon a forest of chimneys, and tainted with odours of stables and kitchen; Mildred's butterfly frocks of lace and muslin, with the substantial ugliness of her own attire; Mildred's manifold possessions—trinkets, toys, books, games, pictures, and flowers—with her empty dressing-table and unadorned walls.

"At your age white frocks would be ridiculous," said Bell; yet Fay saw other girls of her age flaunting in white muslin all that summer through.

Sometimes the footman forgot to bring her lamp, and she would sit in the schoolroom window, looking down into the street, and watching the carriages roll by in endless procession, with their lamps flaming in the pale gray night, carrying their freight

to balls and parties, hurrying from pleasure to pleasure on swift-revolving wheels. A melancholy hour this for the longing heart of youth, even when the schoolgirl's future participation in all these pleasures is a certainty, or contingent only upon life; but what was it for this girl, who had all girlhood's yearnings for pleasure and excitement, and who knew not if that sparkling draught would ever touch her lips, who felt herself an alien in this fine house, a stranger at this fashionable end of the town? It was no new thing for her to sit alone in the twilight, a prey to melancholy thoughts. Ever since she could remember, her life had been solitary and loveless. The home ties and tender associations which sweeten other lives were unknown to her. She had never known what love meant till she felt Mildred's warm arms clinging round her neck, and Mildred's soft cheek pressed against hers. Her life had been a shifting scene peopled with strangers. Dim and misty memories of childhood's earliest dawn conjured up a cottage-garden on a windy hill; the sea stretching far away in the distance, bright and blue, but unattainable; a patch of grass on one side, a

patch of potatoes on the other; a bed of wallflowers and stocks and yellow marigolds in front of the parlour window; a family of hens and an arrogant cock strutting in the foreground; and, standing out sharply against the sky and the sea, a tall column surmounted by a statue.

How she had longed to get nearer that vast expanse of water, to find out what the sea was like! From some points in the view it seemed so near, almost as if she could touch it with her outstretched hands; from other points it looked so far away. She used to stand on a bank behind the cottage and watch the white-sailed boats going out to sea, and the steamers with their trailing smoke melting and vanishing on the horizon.

"Where do they go?" she asked in her baby French. "Where do they go?"

Those were the first words she remembered speaking, and nobody seemed ever to have answered that eager question.

No one had cared for her in those days. She was very sure of that, looking back upon that monotonous childhood: a long series of empty hours in

a cottage garden, and with no companions except the fowls, and no voice except that of the cow in the meadow hard by: a cow which sent forth meaningless bellows occasionally, and which she feared as if it had been a lion.

There was a woman in a white cap whom she called Nounou, and who seemed too busy to care about anybody; a woman who did all the housework, and dug the potato-garden, and looked after the fowls, and milked the cow and made butter, and rode to market on a donkey once or twice a week: a woman who was always in a hurry. There was a man who came home from work at sundown, and there were two boys in blouses and sabots, the youngest of whom was too old to play with the nurse-child. Long summer days in the chalky garden, long hours of listless monotony in front of the wide bright sea, had left a sense of oppression upon Fay's mind. She did not know even the name of the town she had seen far below the long ridge of chalky hill—a town of tall white houses and domes and spires, which had seemed a vast metropolis to the eyes of infancy. She had but to shut her eyes in her evening

solitude, and she could conjure up the picture of roofs and spires, and hill and sea, and the tall column in its railed enclosure; yet she knew no more of town or hill than that they were on the other side of the Channel.

She remembered lying in a narrow little bed, that rocked desperately on a windy day, and looking out at the white sea-foam dashing against a curious oval window, like a giant's eye; and then she remembered her first wondering experience of railway travelling; a train flashing past green fields and hop-gardens and houses; and then darkness and the jolting of a cab; and after that being carried half-asleep into a strange house, and waking to find herself in a strange room, all very clean and neat, with a white-curtained bed and white muslin window-curtains, and on looking out of the window, behold, there was a patch of common all abloom with yellow gorse.

She remembered dimly that she had travelled in the charge of a little gray-haired man, who disappeared after the journey. She found herself now in the care of an elderly lady, very prim and strict, but not absolutely unkind; who wore a silk

gown, and a gold watch at her waistband, and who talked in an unknown tongue. Everything here was prettier than in Nounou's house, and there was a better garden, a garden where there were more flowers and no potatoes and there was the common in the front of the garden, all hillocks and hollows, where she was allowed to amuse herself in charge of a ruddy-faced girl in a lavender cotton frock.

The old lady taught her the unknown tongue, which she discovered in time to be English, and a good deal besides—reading and writing, for instance, and the rudiments of music, a little arithmetic, grammar, and geography. She took kindly to music and reading, and she liked to dabble with ink; but the other lessons were abhorrent, and she gave the orderly old lady a good deal of trouble. There was no love between them, only endurance on either side; and the long days on the common were almost as desolate as the days on the chalky hill above the sea.

At last there came a change. The dressmaker sent home three new frocks, all uncompromisingly ugly; the little old gray-haired man reappeared,

looking exactly as he had looked on board the steamer, and a fly carried Fay and this guardian to the railway-station on the common, and thence the train took them to a great dark city, which the man told Fay was London; and then they went in a cab through streets that seemed endless, till at last the streets melted into a wide high-road, with trees on either side, and the cab drove into a garden of shining laurels and rhododendrons, and pulled up before a classic portico. Fay had no memory of any house so grand as this, although it was only the conventional suburban villa of sixty or seventy years ago.

Just at first the change seemed delightful That circular carriage-sweep, those shining rhododendrons with great rose-coloured trusses of bloom, the drooping gold of the laburnums, and the masses of perfumed lilac, were beautiful in her eyes. Not so beautiful the long, bare schoolroom and the willow-pattern cups and saucers. Not so beautiful that all-pervading atmosphere of restraint which made school odious to Fay from the outset.

She stayed there for years—an eternity it seemed to her, looking back upon its hopeless monotony.

Pleasure, variety, excitement, she had none. Life was an everlasting treadmill—up and down, down and up, over and over again. The same dull round of lessons; a dismal uniformity of food; Sunday penance in the shape of two long services in a badly ventilated church, and one long catechism in a dreary schoolroom. No gaol can be much duller than a well-regulated middle-class girls' school. Fay could complain of no ill-treatment. She was well fed, comfortably housed, warmly clad; but her life was a burden to her.

She had a bad temper; was irritable, impatient, quick to take offence, and prone to fits of sullenness. This was the opinion of the authorities; and her faults increased as she grew older. She was not absolutely rebellious towards the governesses; but there was always something amiss. She was idle and listless at her studies, took no interest in anything but her music-lessons, and was altogether an unsatisfactory pupil. She had no lasting friendships among her schoolfellows. She was capricious in her likings, and was prone to fancy herself slighted or ill-treated on the smallest provocation. The general

verdict condemned her as the most disagreeable girl in the school. With the meaner souls among her schoolfellows it was considered an affront that she should have no antecedents worth talking about, no relatives, no home, and no hampers or presents. Even the servants neglected her as a young person without surroundings, upon whom kindness would be thrown away. The wardrobe-woman left her clothes unmended, feeling that it mattered very little in what order they were kept, since the girl never went home for the holidays, and there was no mother or aunt to investigate her trunks. She was condemned on every hand as a discreditable mystery; and when, one unlucky afternoon, a sultry afternoon at the beginning of a hot summer, she lost her temper in the middle of a class-lesson, burst into a torrent of angry speech, half defiance, half reproach, bounced up from her seat, and rushed out of the schoolroom, there were few to pity, and none to sympathise.

The proprietress of the school was elderly and lymphatic. Miss Fausset had been stigmatised as a troublesome pupil for a long time. There were continual complaints about Miss Fausset's conduct,

worrying complaints, which spoilt Miss Constable's dinner and interfered with her digestion. Really, the only course open to that prosperous, over-fed personage was to get rid of Miss Fausset. There was an amiable family of three sisters — highly connected young persons, whose father was in the wine trade—waiting for vacancies in that old-established seminary.

"We will make a *tabula rasa* of a troublesome past," said Miss Constable, who loved fine words. "Miss Fausset must go."

Thus it was that John Fausset had been suddenly called upon to find a new home for his ward; and thus it was that Fay had been brought to Upper Parchment Street.

No doubt Upper Parchment Street was better than school; but if it had not been for Mildred the atmosphere on the edge of Hyde Park would have been no more congenial than the atmosphere at Streatham. Fay felt herself an intruder in that splendid house, where, amidst that multitude of pretty things, she could not put her finger upon one gracious object that belonged to her—nothing that

was her "very own," as Mildred called it; for she had refused Mildred's doll and all other proffered gifts, too proud to profit by a child's lavish generosity. Mrs. Fausset made her no gifts, never talked to her, rarely looked at her.

Fay knew that Mrs. Fausset disliked her. She had divined as much from the first, and she knew only too well that dislike had grown with experience. She was allowed to go down to afternoon tea with Mildred; but had she been deaf and dumb her society could not have been less cultivated by the mistress of the house. Mrs. Fausset's feelings were patent to the whole household, and were common talk in the servants' hall. "No wonder," said the women; the men said "What a shame!" but footmen and housemaids were at one in their treatment of Fay, which was neglectful, and occasionally insolent. It would hardly have been possible for them to behave well to the intruder and keep in favour with Bell, who was absolute—a superior power to butler or housekeeper, a person with no stated office, and the supreme right to interfere with everybody.

Bell sighed and shook her head whenever Miss

Fay was mentioned. She bridled with pent-up indignation, as if the girl's existence were an injury to her, Martha Bell. "If *I* hadn't nursed Mrs. Fausset when she was the loveliest infant that ever drew breath, *I* shouldn't feel it so much," said Bell; and then tears would spring to her eyes and chokings would convulse her throat, and the housekeeper would shake her head and sympathise mysteriously.

At the end of July the establishment migrated from Parchment Street to The Hook, Mr. Fausset's riverside villa between Chertsey and Windsor. The Hook was an expanse of meadow-land bordered with willows, round which the river made a loop; and on this enchanted bit of ground—a spot loved by the river-god—Mr. Fausset had built for himself the most delightful embodiment of that much-abused word villa; a long, low, white house, with spacious rooms, broad corridors, a double flight of marble stairs, meeting on a landing lit by an Italian cupola —a villa surrounded with a classic colonnade, and looking out upon peerless gardens sloping to the willow-shadowed stream.

To Fay The Hook seemed like a vision of Para-

dise. It was almost happiness even to her impatient spirit to sit in a corner of those lovely grounds, screened from the outer world by a dense wall of Portugal laurels and arbutus, with the blue water and the low, flat meadows of the further shore for her only prospect.

Miss Colville was left behind in London. For Fay and Mildred life was a perpetual holiday. Mrs. Fausset was almost as much in society at The Hook as she had been in London. Visitors came and visitors went. She was never alone. There were parties at Henley and Marlow, and Wargrave and Goring. Two pairs of horses were kept hard at work carrying Mr. and Mrs. Fausset about that lovely riverside landscape to garden-parties and dinners, picnics and regattas. John Fausset went because his wife liked him to go, and because he liked to see her happy and admired. The two girls were left, for the most part, to their own devices, under the supervision of Bell. They lived in the gardens, with an occasional excursion into the unknown world along the river. There was a trustworthy under-gardener, who was a good oarsman,

and in his charge Mildred was allowed to go on the water in a big wherry, which looked substantial enough to have carried a select boarding-school.

This life by the Thames was the nearest approach to absolute happiness which Fay had ever known; but for her there was to be no such thing as unbroken bliss. In the midst of the sultry August weather Mildred fell ill—a mild attack of scarlet fever, which sounded less alarming to Mrs. Fausset's ear, because the doctor spoke of it as scarlatina. It was a very mild case, the local practitioner told Mrs. Fausset; there was no occasion to send for a London physician; there was no occasion for alarm. Mildred must keep her bed for a fortnight, and must be isolated from the rest of the house. Her own maid might nurse her if she had had the complaint.

"How could she have caught the fever?" Mrs. Fausset asked, with an injured air; and there was a grand investigation, but no scarlet fever to be heard of nearer than Maidenhead.

"People are so artful in hiding these things," said Mrs. Fausset; and ten minutes afterwards she

begged the doctor not to mention Mildred's malady to any of her neighbours.

"We have such a host of engagements, and crowds of visitors coming from London," she said. "People are so ridiculously nervous. Of course I shall be extremely careful."

The doctor gave elaborate instructions about isolation. Such measures being taken, Mrs. Fausset might receive all fashionable London with safety.

"And it is really such a mild case that you need not put yourself about in any way," concluded the doctor.

"Dear, sweet pet, we must do all we can to amuse her," sighed the fond mother.

Mild as the case might be, the patient had to suffer thirst and headache, a dry and swollen throat, and restless nights. Her most eager desire was for Fay's company, and as it was ascertained that Fay had suffered from scarlet fever some years before in a somewhat severe form, it was considered she might safely assist in the sick-room.

She was there almost all day, and very often in the night. She read to Mildred, and sang to her,

and played with her, and indulged every changing fancy and caprice of sickness. Her love was inexhaustible, indefatigable, for ever on the watch. If Mildred woke from a feverish dream in the deep of night, with a little agitated sob or cry, she found a figure in a white dressing-gown bending over her, and loving arms encircling her before she had time to feel frightened. Fay slept in a little dressing-room opening out of Mildred's large, airy bedroom, so as to be near her darling. It was a mere closet, with a truckle-bed brought down from the servants' attic; but it was good enough for Fay, whose only thought was of the child who loved her as none other had ever loved within her memory.

Mrs. Fausset was prettily anxious about her child. She would come to Mildred's room in her dressing-gown before her leisurely morning toilet, to hear the last report. She would sit by the bed for five minutes showering kisses on the pale cheeks, and then she would go away to her long summer-day of frivolous pleasures and society talk. Ripples of laughter and snatches of speech came floating in at the open windows; and at Mildred's behest Fay

would stand at a window and report the proceedings of that happy world outside.

"They are going out in the boat. They are going to have tea on the lawn. Your mamma is walking up and down with Sir Horace Clavering. Miss Grenville and her sister are playing croquet;" and so on, and so on, all day.

Mildred tossed about on her pretty white bed impatiently.

"It is very horrid being shut up here on these fine days," she said; "or it would be horrid without you, Fay. Mamma does not come to see me much."

Mamma came three or four times a day; but her visits were of the briefest. She would come into the room beaming with smiles, looking like living sunlight in her exquisite white gown, with its delicate ribbons and cloudy lace—a fleecy white cloud just touched with rose-colour, as if she were an embodiment of the summer dawn. Sometimes she brought Mildred a peach, or a bunch of hothouse grapes, or an orchid, or a new picture-book; but beautiful as these offerings were, the child did not always value them. She would push the plate of

grapes or the peach aside impatiently when her mother was gone, or she would entreat Fay to eat the dainty.

"Mamma thinks I am greedy," she said; "but I ain't, am I, Fay?"

Those three weeks in the sick-room, those wakeful nights and long, slow summer days, strengthened the bond of love between the two girls. By the time Mildred was convalescent they seemed to have loved each other for years. Mildred could hardly remember what her life was like before she had Fay for a companion. Mrs. Fausset saw this growing affection not without jealousy; but it was very convenient that there should be some one in the house whose companionship kept Mildred happy, and she even went so far as to admit that Fay was "useful."

"I cannot be with the dear child half so much as I should like to be," she said; "visitors are so exacting."

Fay had slept very little during Mildred's illness, and now that the child was nearly well the elder girl began to flag somewhat, and was tired early in the evening, and glad to go to bed at the same hour as

the patient, who, under Bell's supervision, was made to retire before eight. She was now well enough to sit up all day, and to drive out in a pony-carriage in the sunny hours after early dinner. Fay went with her, of course. Pony and landscape would have been wanting in charm without Fay's company. Both girls had gone to bed one sultry evening in the faint gray twilight. Fay was sleeping profoundly; but Mildred, after dozing a little, was lying half-awake, with closed eyelids, in the flower-scented room. The day had been exceptionally warm. The windows were all open, and a door between Mildred's bedroom and sitting-room had been left ajar.

Bell was in the sitting-room at her favourite task of clearing up the scattered toys and books, and reducing all things to mathematical precision. Meta, Mildred's German maid, was sitting at needlework near the window by the light of a shaded lamp. The light shone in the twilight through the partly-open door, and gave Mildred a sense of company. They began to talk presently, and Mildred listened, idly at first, and soothed by the sound of their voices, but afterwards with keen curiosity.

"I know I shouldn't like to be treated so," said Meta.

"*I* don't see that she has anything to complain of," answered Bell. "She has a good home, and everything provided for her. What more can she want?"

"I should want a good deal more if I was a heiress."

"*An* heiress," corrected Bell, who prided herself on having cultivated her mind, and was somewhat pedantic of speech. "That's all nonsense, Meta. She's no more an heiress than I am. Mr. Fausset told my poor young mistress that just to throw dust in her eyes. Heiress, indeed! An heiress without a relative in the world that she can speak of—an heiress that has dropped from the moon. Don't tell *me*."

Nobody was telling Mrs. Bell anything; but she had a resentful air, as if combating the arguments of an invisible adversary.

There was a silence during which Mildred nearly fell asleep; and then the voices began again.

"It's impossible for sisters to be fonder of each other than those two are," said Meta.

"There's nothing strange in that, considering they *are* sisters," answered Bell angrily.

"O, but you've no right to say that, Mrs. Bell; it's going too far."

"Haven't I a right to use my eyes and ears? Can't I see the family look in those two faces, though Miss Mildred is pretty and Miss Fay is plain? Can't I hear the same tones in the two voices, and haven't I seen his way of bringing that girl into the house, and his guilty look before my poor injured mistress? Of course they're sisters. Who could ever doubt it? *She* doesn't, I know, poor dear."

She, in this connection, meant Mrs. Fausset.

There was only one point in this speech which the innocent child seized upon. She and Fay were said to be sisters. O, how she had longed for a sister in the last year or so of her life, since she had found out the meaning of solitude among fairest surroundings! How all the brightest things she possessed had palled upon her for want of sisterly

companionship! How she had longed for a baby-sister even, and had envied the children in households where a new baby was an annual institution! She had wondered why her mother did not treat herself to a new baby occasionally, as so many of her mother's friends did. And now Fay had been given to her, ever so much better than a baby, which would have taken such a long time to grow up. Mildred had never calculated how long, but she concluded that it would be some months before the most forward baby would be of a companionable age. Fay had been given to her—a ready-made companion, versed in fairy tales, able to conjure up an enchanted world out of the schoolroom piano, skilful with pencil and colour-box, able to draw the faces and figures and palaces and woodlands of that fairy world, able to amuse and entertain her in a hundred ways. And Fay was her sister after all. She dropped asleep in a flutter of pleasurable excitement. She would ask her mother all about it to-morrow; and in the meantime she would say nothing to Fay. It was fun to have a secret from Fay.

A batch of visitors left next day after lunch.

Mr. and Mrs. Fausset were to be alone for forty-eight hours, a rare oasis of domesticity in the society desert. Mildred had been promised that the first day there was no company she was to have tea with mamma in the tent on the lawn. She claimed the fulfilment of that promise to-day.

It was a lovely day after the sultry, thundery night. Mrs. Fausset reclined in her basket-chair in the shelter of the tent. Fay and Mildred sat side by side on a low bamboo bench on the grass: the little girl, fairy-like, in her white muslin and flowing flaxen hair, the big girl in olive-coloured alpaca, with dark hair clustering in short curls about the small intelligent head. There could hardly have been a stronger contrast than that between the two girls; and yet Bell was right. There was a family look, an undefinable resemblance of contour and expression which would have struck a very attentive observer—something in the line of the delicate eyebrow, something in the angle of the forehead.

"Mamma," said Mildred suddenly, clambering into her mother's lap, "why mayn't I call Fay sister?"

Mrs. Fausset started, and flushed crimson.

"What nonsense, child! Why, because it would be most ridiculous."

"But she *is* my sister," urged Mildred, looking full into her mother's eyes, with tremendous resolution in her own. "I love her like a sister, and she is my sister. Bell says so."

"Bell is an impertinent person," cried Mrs. Fausset angrily. "When did she say so?"

"Last night, when she thought I was asleep. Mayn't I call Fay sister?" persisted Mildred coaxingly.

"On no account. I never heard anything so shameful. To think that Bell should gossip! An old servant like Bell—my own old nurse. It is too cruel!" cried Mrs. Fausset, forgetting herself in her anger.

Fay stood tall and straight in the sunshine outside the tent, wondering at the storm. She had an instinctive apprehension that Mrs. Fausset's anger was humiliating to her. She knew not why, but she felt a sense of despair darker than any other evil

moment in her life; and yet her evil moments had been many.

"You need not be afraid that I shall ask Mildred to call me sister," she said. "I love her dearly, but I hate everybody else in this house."

"You are a wicked, ungrateful girl," exclaimed Mrs. Fausset, "and I am very sorry I ever saw your face."

Fay drew herself up, looked at the speaker indignantly for a moment or so, and then walked quietly away towards the house.

She passed the footman with the tea-tray as she crossed the lawn, and a little further on she passed John Fausset, who looked at her wonderingly.

Mildred burst out crying.

"How unkind you are, mamma!" she sobbed. "If I mayn't call her my sister I shall always love her like a sister—always, always, always."

"What is the matter with my Mildred?" asked Mr. Fausset, arriving at this moment.

"Nothing. She has only been silly," his wife answered pettishly.

"And Fay—has she been silly, too?"

"Fay, your *protégée*, has been most impertinent to me. But I suppose that does not count."

"It does count, for a good deal, if she has been intentionally impertinent," answered Fausset gravely.

He looked back after Fay's vanishing figure with a troubled expression. He had so sighed for peace. He had hoped that the motherless girl might be taken into his home and cared for and made happy, without evil feeling upon any one's part; and now he could see by his wife's countenance that the hope of union and peace was at an end.

"I don't know what you mean about intention," said his wife; "I only know that the girl you are so fond of has just said she hates everybody in this house except Mildred. That sound rather like intentional impertinence, I think."

"Go and play, darling," said Fausset to his child; "or run after Fay, and bring her back to tea."

"You show a vast amount of consideration for your wife," said Mrs. Fausset.

"My dear Maud, I want you to show a little more consideration for that girl, who has been so devoted to Mildred all through her illness, and who

has one very strong claim upon a mother's heart—she is motherless."

"I should think more of that claim, perhaps, if I knew who her mother was, and what she was to you," said Maud Fausset.

"She was once near and dear to me. That is all I can tell you, Maud; and it ought to be enough."

"It is more than enough," his wife answered, trembling from head to foot, as she rose from her low chair, and walked away from the tent.

John Fausset looked after her irresolutely, went a few steps as if he meant to follow her, and then turned back to the tent, just as Mildred reappeared with Fay from another direction.

"We three will have tea together," he exclaimed, with demonstrative cheerfulness. "Mamma is not very well, Mildred; she has gone back to the house. You shall pour out my tea."

He seated himself in his wife's chair, and Mildred sat on his knee, and put her arms round his neck, and adored him with all her power of adoration. Her household divinity had ever been the father.

Perhaps her baby mind had found out the weakness of one parent and the strength of the other.

"Fay shall pour out the tea," she said, with a sense of self-sacrifice. "It will be a treat for Fay."

So Fay poured out the tea, and they all three sat in the tent, and were happy and merry—or seemingly so, perhaps, as concerned John Fausset—for one whole sunshiny hour, and for the first time Fay felt that she was not an outsider. Yet there lurked in her mind the memory of Mrs. Fausset's anger, and that memory was bitter.

"What am I, that almost everybody should be rude to me?" she asked herself, as she sat alone that night after Mildred had gone to bed.

From the open windows below came the languid sweetness of a nocturne by Chopin. Mrs. Fausset was playing her husband to sleep after dinner. Sure token of reconciliation between husband and wife.

The doctor came next morning. He appeared upon alternate days now, and looked at Mildred in a casual manner, after exhausting the local gossip with Mrs. Fausset. This morning he and Mrs.

Fausset were particularly confidential before the patient was sent for.

"Admirable!" he exclaimed, when he had looked at her tongue and felt her pulse; "we are as nearly well as we can be. All we want now is a little sea-air to set us up for the winter. The great point, my dear madam"—to Mrs. Fausset—"is to avoid all risk of *sequelæ*. A fortnight at Brighton or Eastbourne will restore our little friend to perfect health."

There were no difficulties in the way of such people as the Faussets, no question of ways and means. Bell was sent for, and despatched to Eastbourne by an afternoon train. She was to take lodgings in a perfect position, and of impeccable repute as to sanitation. Mildred was to follow next day, under convoy of Meta and the under-butler, a responsible person of thirty-five.

"Fay must go, too," exclaimed Mildred; whereupon followed a tragic scene.

Fay was not to go to Eastbourne. No reasons were assigned for the decision. Mildred was to ride a donkey; she was to have a pony-carriage at her

disposition; but she was to be without Fay for a whole fortnight. In a fortnight she would be able to come home again.

"How many days are there in a fortnight?" she asked piteously.

"Fourteen."

"O Fay, fourteen days away from you!" she exclaimed, clinging with fond arms round Fay's neck, and pulling down the dark head on a level with her own bright hair.

Fay was pale, but tearless, and said not a word. She let Mildred kiss her, and kissed back again, but in a dead silence. She went into the hall with the child, and to the carriage-door, and they kissed each other on the doorstep, and they kissed at the carriage-window; and then the horses trotted away along the gravel drive, and Fay had a last glimpse of the fair head thrust out of the window, and the lilies and roses of a child's face framed in pale gold hair.

It was a little more than a fortnight before Bell and her charge went back to The Hook. Mildred had sorely missed her playfellow, but had consoled

herself with a spade and pail on the beach, and a donkey of venerable aspect, whose chief distinction was his white linen panoply, on the long dusty roads.

Mrs. Fausset was not at home to receive her daughter. She had a superior duty at Chertsey, where people of some social importance were giving a lawn-party. The house seemed empty and silent, and all its brightness and graceful furniture, and flowers in the hall and on the staircase, could not atone for that want of human life.

"Where is Fay?" cried Mildred, taking alarm.

Nobody answered a question which was addressed to everybody.

"Fay, Fay, where are you?" cried the child, and then rushed up-stairs to the schoolroom, light as a lapwing, distracted with that sudden fear. "Fay, Fay!" The treble cry rang through the house.

No one in the schoolroom, nor in Mildred's bedroom, nor in the little room where Fay had slept, nor in the drawing-rooms, whither Mildred came running, after that futile quest up-stairs.

Bell met her in the hall, with a letter in her hand.

"Your mamma wished to break it to you herself, miss," said Bell. "Miss Fay has gone."

"Gone, where?"

"To Brussels."

"Where is Brussels?"

"*I* believe, miss, that it is the capital of Belgium."

Mildred tore open the letter, which Bell read aloud over the child's shoulder.

"I hope you won't be grieved at losing your playfellow, my dearest pet. Fay is dreadfully backward in her education, and has no manners. She has gone to a finishing-school at Brussels, and you may not see her again for some years."

And so the years go by, and this story passes on to a time when the child Mildred is a child no more, but the happy mother of a fair young daughter, and the wife of an idolised husband.

CHAPTER V.

WITHOUT THE WOLF.

"FATHER," said Lola, "there are ever so many people in the village ill with fever. Isn't it sad?"

Mr. and Mrs. Greswold, of Enderby Manor, had been submitting to a fortnight's dissipation in London, and this was their first Sunday at home after that interval. They had returned late on the previous night, and house and gardens had all the sweetness and freshness of a scene to which one is restored after absence. They had spent the summer morning in the little village church with their daughter; and now they were enjoying the leisure interval between church and luncheon.

George Greswold sat in a lounging-chair under a cedar within twenty yards of the dining-room windows, and Lola was hanging about him as he read the *Athenæum*, caressing him with little touches of light hands upon his hair or his coat-collar, adoring him with all her might after the agony of severance.

She was his only child, and the love between them was passing the love of the father and daughter of every-day life. It was an almost romantic attachment.

Like most only daughters, Lola was precocious, far in advance of her years in thoughtfulness and emotion, though perhaps a little behind the average girl of twelve in the severities of feminine education. She had been her mother's chief companion ever since she could speak, the confidante of all that mother's thoughts and fancies, which were as innocent as those of childhood itself. She had read much more than most girls of her age, and had been made familiar with poets whose names are only known to the schoolgirl in a history of literature. She knew a good deal about the best books in European literature; but, most of all, she knew the hearts and minds of her father and mother, their loves and likings, their joys and sorrows. She had never been shut out from their confidence; she had never been told to go and play when they wanted to talk to each other. She had sat with them, and walked and ridden and driven with them ever since she was

old enough to dispense with her nurse's arms. She had lived her young life with them, and had been a part of their lives.

George Greswold looked up from his *Athenæum* in quick alarm.

"Fever!" he exclaimed, "fever at Enderby!"

"Strange, isn't it, father? Everybody is wondering about it. Enderby has always been such a healthy village, and you have taken such pains to make it so."

"Yes, love, I have done my best. I am a landlord for pleasure, and not for gain, as you and mother know."

"And what seems strangest and worst of all," continued Lola, "is that this dreadful fever has broken out among the people you and mother and I are fondest of—our old friends and pensioners—and the children we know most about. It seems so hard that those you and mother have helped the most should be the first to be ill."

"Yes, love, that must seem very hard to my tender-hearted darling."

Her father looked up at her fondly as she stood

behind his chair, her white arm leaning upon his shoulder. The summer was in its zenith. It was strawberry-time, rose-time, haymaking-time—the season of nightingales and meadow-sweet and tall Mary lilies, and all those lovely things that cluster in the core of summer's great warm heart. Lola was all in white—a loose muslin frock, straight from shoulder to instep. Her thick gold hair fell straight as her frock below her ungirdled waist, and, in her white and gold, she had the look of an angel in an early Italian picture. Her eyes were as blue as that cloudless sky of midsummer which took a deeper azure behind the black-green branches of the cedar.

"My pet, I take it this fever is some slight summer malady. Cottagers are such ravens. They always make the worst of an illness."

"O, but they really have been very bad. Mary Martin has had the fever, but she is getting better. And there's Johnny Giles; you know what a strong boy *he* is. He's very bad, poor little chap—so delirious; and I do feel so sorry for his poor mother. And young Mrs. Peter has it, and two of her children."

"It must be contagious," cried Greswold, seizing his daughter's round white arm with an agitated movement. "You have not been to see any of them, have you, Lola?" he asked, looking at her with unspeakable anxiety.

"No; Bell wouldn't let me go to see any of them; but of course I have taken them things every day—wine and beef-tea and jelly, and everything we could think of; and they have had as much milk as they liked."

"You should not have gone yourself with the things, darling. You should have sent them."

"That would seem so unkind, as if one hardly cared; and Puck with nothing to do all the time but to drag me about. It was no trouble to go myself. I did not even go inside the cottages. Bell said I mustn't."

"Bell was right. Well, I suppose there is no harm done if you didn't go into any of the cottages; and it was very sweet of you to take the things yourself; like Red Riding Hood, only without the wolf. There goes the gong. I hope you are hungry."

"Not very. The weather is too warm for eating anything but strawberries."

He looked at her anxiously again, ready to take alarm at a word.

"Yes, it is too warm in this south-western country," he said nervously. "We'll go to Scotland next week."

"So soon?"

"Why not a little sooner than usual, for once in a way?"

"I shall be sorry to go away while the people are ill," she said gravely.

George Greswold forgot that the gong had sounded. He sat, leaning forward, in a despondent attitude. The very mention of sickness in the land had unhinged him. This child was so dear to him, his only one. He had done all that forethought, sense, and science could do to make the village which lay at his doors the perfection of health and purity. Famous sanitarians had been entertained at the Manor, and had held counsel with Mr. Greswold upon the progress of sanitation, and its latest developments. They had wondered with him

over the blind ignorance of our forefathers. They had instructed him how to drain his house, and how to ventilate and purify his cottages. They had assured him that, so far as lay within the limits of human intelligence, perfection had been achieved in Enderby village and Enderby Manor House.

And now his idolised daughter hung over his chair and told him that there was fever raging in the land, his land; the land which he loved as if it were a living thing, and on which he had lavished care and money ever since he had owned it. Other men might consider their ancestral estates as something to be lived upon; George Greswold thought of his forefathers' house and lands as something to be lived for. His cottages were model cottages, and he was known far and wide as a model landlord.

"George, are you quite forgetting luncheon?" asked a voice from one of the open windows, and he looked up to see a beautiful face looking out at him, framed in hair of Lola's colour.

"My dear Mildred, come here for a moment?" he said, and his wife went to him, smiling still, but with a shade of uneasiness in her face.

"Go in, pet. We'll follow you directly," he said to his daughter; and then he rose slowly, with an air of being almost broken down by a great trouble, and put his hand through his wife's arm, and led her along the velvet turf beyond the cedar.

"Mildred, have you heard of this fever?"

"Yes; Louisa told me this morning when she was doing my hair. It seems to be rather bad; but there cannot be any danger, surely, after all you have done to make the cottages perfect in every way?"

"One cannot tell. There may be a germ of evil brought from somewhere else. I am sorry Lola has been among the people."

"O, but she has not been inside any of the cottages. Bell took care to prevent that."

"Bell was wise, but she might have done better still. She should have telegraphed to us. Lola must not go about any more. You will see to that, won't you, dearest? Before the end of the week I will take you both to Scotland."

"Do you really suppose there can be danger?" she asked, growing very pale.

"No, no, I don't apprehend danger. Only it is better to be over-cautious than over-bold. We cannot be too careful of our treasure."

"No, no, indeed," answered the mother, with a piteous look.

"Mother," called Lola from the window, "are you ever coming? Pomfret will be late for church."

Pomfret was the butler, whose convenience had to be studied upon Sundays. The servants dined while the family were at luncheon, and almost all the establishment went to afternoon service, leaving a footman and an under-housemaid in sole possession of the grave old manor-house, where the silence had a solemnity as in some monastic chapel. Lola was anxious that luncheon should begin, and Pomfret be dismissed to eat his dinner.

This child of twelve had more than a woman's forethought. She spent her life in thinking about other people; but of all those whom she loved, and for whom she cared, her father was first and chief. For him her love was akin to worship.

She watched his face anxiously now, as she took her seat at his right hand, and was silent until

Pomfret had served the soup and retired, leaving all the rest of the luncheon on the table, and the wine on a dumb-waiter by his master's side.

There was always a cold lunch on Sundays, and the evening meal was also cold, a compromise between dinner and supper, served at nine o'clock, by which time the servants had gratified their various tastes for church or chapel, and had enjoyed an evening walk. There was no parsonage in England where the day of rest was held in more reverence than it was at Enderby Manor.

Mr. Greswold was no bigot, his religion in no wise savoured of the over-good school; but he was a man of deep religious convictions; and he had been brought up to honour Sunday as a day set apart.

The Sunday parties and Sunday amusements of fashionable London were an abomination to him, though he was far too liberal-minded to wish to shut museums and picture-galleries against the people.

"Father," said Lola, when they were alone, "I'm afraid you had your bad dream last night."

Greswold looked at her curiously.

"No, love, my dreams were colourless, and have left not even a remembrance."

"And yet you look sorrowful, just as you always look after your bad dream."

"Your father is anxious about the cottagers who are ill, dearest," said Mrs. Greswold. "That is all."

"But you must not be unhappy about them, father dear. You don't think that any of them will die, do you?" asked Lola, drawing very near him, and looking up at him with awe-stricken eyes.

"Indeed, my love, I hope not. They shall not die, if care can save them. I will walk round the village with Porter this afternoon, and find out all about the trouble. If there is anything that he cannot understand, we'll have Dr. Hutchinson over from Southampton, or a physician from London if necessary. My people shall not be neglected."

"May I go with you this afternoon, father?"

"No, dearest, neither you nor mother must leave the grounds till we go away. I will have no needless risks run by my dear ones."

Neither mother nor daughter disputed his will

upon this point. He was the sole arbiter of their lives. It seemed almost as if they lived only to please him. Both would have liked to go with him; both thought him over-cautious; yet neither attempted to argue the point. Happy household in which there are no arguments upon domestic trifles, no bickerings about the infinitesimals of life!

Enderby Manor was one of those ideal homes which adorn the face of England and sustain its reputation as the native soil of domestic virtues, the country in which good wives and good mothers are indigenous.

There are many such ideal homes in the land as to outward aspect, seen from the high-road, across park or pasture, shrubbery or flower-garden; but only a few of these sustain the idea upon intimate knowledge of the interior.

Here, within as well as without, the atmosphere was peace. Those velvet lawns and brilliant flower-beds were not more perfect than the love between husband and wife, child and parents. No cloud had ever shadowed that serene heaven of domestic peace.

George Greswold had married at thirty a girl of eighteen who adored him; and those two had lived for each other and for their only child ever since. All outside the narrow circle of family love counted only as the margin or the framework of life. All the deepest and sweetest elements of life were within the veil. Mildred Greswold could not conceive a fashionable woman's existence—a life given up to frivolous occupations and futile excitements—a life of empty pleasure faintly flavoured with art, literature, science, philanthropy, and politics, and fancying itself eminently useful and eminently progressive. She had seen such an existence in her childhood, and had wondered that any reasoning creature could so live. She had turned her back upon the modish world when she married George Greswold, and had surrendered most of the delights of society to lead quiet days in her husband's ancestral home, loving that old house for his sake, as he loved it for the sake of the dead.

They were not in outer darkness, however, as to the movement of the world. They spent a fortnight at Limmers occasionally, when the fancy moved

them. They saw all the pictures worth seeing, heard a good deal of the best music, mixed just enough in society to distinguish gold from tinsel, and to make a happy choice of friends.

They occasionally treated themselves to a week in Paris, and their autumn holidays were mostly spent in a shooting-box twenty miles beyond Inverness. They came back to the Manor in time for the pheasant-shooting, and the New Year generally began with a house-party which lasted with variations until the hunting was all over, and the young leaves were green in the neighbouring forest. No lives could have been happier, or fuller of interest; but the interest all centred in home. Farmers and cottagers on the estate were cared for as a part of home; and the estate itself was loved almost as a living thing by husband and wife, and the fair child who had been born to them in the old-fashioned house.

The grave red-brick manor-house had been built when William III. was King; and there were some Dutch innovations in the Old English architecture, notably a turret or pavilion at the end of each wing,

and a long bowling-green on the western side of the garden. The walls had that deep glowing red which is only seen in old brickwork, and the black glazed tiles upon the hopper roof glittered in the sunlight with the prismatic hues of antique Rhodian glass. The chief characteristic of the interior was the oak-panelling, which clothed the rooms and corridors as in a garment of sober brown, and would have been suggestive of gloom but for the pictures and porcelain which brightened every wall, and the rich colouring of brocaded curtains and tapestry *portières*. The chief charm of the house was the aspect of home life, the books and musical instruments, the art treasures, and flowers, and domestic trifles to be seen everywhere; the air which every room and every nook and corner had of being lived in by home-loving and home-keeping people.

The pavilion at the end of the south-west wing was Lola's special domain, that and the room communicating with it. That pretty sitting-room, with dwarf book-shelves, water-colour pictures, and Wedgwood china, was never called a schoolroom. It was Lola's study.

"There shall be no suggestion of school in our home," said George Greswold.

It was he who chose his daughter's masters, and it was often he who attended during the lesson, listening intently to the progress of the work, and as keenly interested in the pupil's progress as the pupil herself. Latin he himself taught her, and she already knew by heart those noblest of Horace's odes which are fittest for young lips. Their philosophy saddened her a little.

"Is life always changing?" she asked her father; "must one never venture to be quite happy?"

The Latin poet's pervading idea of mutability, inevitable death, and inevitable change impressed her with a flavour of sadness, child as she was.

"My dearest, had Horace been a Christian, as you are, and had he lived for others, as you do, he would not have been afraid to call himself happy," answered George Greswold. "He was a Pagan, and he put on the armour of philosophy for want of the armour of faith."

These lessons in the classics, taking a dead language not as a dry study of grammar and dic-

tionary, but as the gate to new worlds of poetry and philosophy, had been Lola's delight. She was in no wise unpleasantly precocious; but she was far in advance of the conventional schoolroom child, trained into characterless uniformity by a superior governess. Lola had never been under governess rule. Her life at the Manor had been as free as that of the butterflies. There was only Bell to lecture her—white-haired Mrs. Bell, thin and spare, straight as an arrow, at seventy-four years of age, the embodiment of servants'-hall gentility, in her black silk afternoon gown and neat cambric cap—Bell, who looked after Lola's health, and Lola's rooms, and was for ever tidying the drawers and tables, and lecturing upon the degeneracy of girlhood. It was her boast to have nursed Lola's grandmother, as well as Lola's mother, which seemed going back to the remoteness of the dark ages.

Enderby Manor was three miles from Romsey, and within riding or driving distance of the New Forest and of Salisbury Cathedral. It lay in the heart of a pastoral district watered by the Test, and

was altogether one of the most enjoyable estates in that part of the country.

Before luncheon was finished a messenger was on his way to the village to summon Mr. Porter, more commonly Dr. Porter, the parish and everybody's doctor, an elderly man of burly figure, close-cropped gray hair, and yeoman-like bearing—a man born on the soil, whose father and grandfather and great-grandfather had cured or killed the inhabitants of Enderby parish from time immemorial. Judging from the tombstones in the pretty old churchyard, they must have cured more than they killed; for those crumbling moss-grown stones bore the record of patriarchal lives, and the union near Enderby was a museum of incipient centenarians.

Mr. Porter came into the grave old library at the Manor looking more serious than his wont, perhaps in sympathy with George Greswold's anxious face, turned towards the door as the footman opened it.

"Well, Porter, what does it all mean, this fever?" asked Greswold abruptly.

Mr. Porter had a manner of discussing a case which was all his own. He always appealed to his

patient with a professional air, as if consulting another medical authority, and a higher one than himself. It was flattering, perhaps, but not always satisfactory.

"Well, you see, there's the high temperature —104 in some cases—and there's the inflamed throat, and there's headache. What do *you* say?"

"Don't talk nonsense, Porter; you must know whether it is an infectious fever or not. If you don't know, we'll send to Southampton for Hutchinson."

"Of course, you can have him if you like. I judge more by temperature than anything—the thermometer is a safer guide than the pulse, as you know. I took their temperatures this morning before I went to church: only one case in which there was improvement—all the others decidedly worse; very strongly developed cases of malignant fever—typhus or typhoid—which, as you know, by Jenner's differentiation of the two forms—"

"For God's sake, man, don't talk to me as if I were a doctor, and had your ghoulish relish of

disease! If you have the slightest doubt as to treatment, send for Hutchinson."

He took a sheaf of telegraph-forms from the stand in front of him, and began to write his message while he was talking. He had made up his mind that Dr. Hutchinson must come to see these humble sufferers, and to investigate the cause of evil. He had taken such pains to create a healthy settlement, had spared no expense; and for fifteen years, from the hour of his succession until now, all had gone well with him. And now there was fever in the land, fever in the air breathed by those two beloved ones, daughter and wife.

"I have been so happy; my life has been cloudless, save for one dark memory," he said to himself, covering his face with his hands as he leaned with his elbows on the table, while Mr. Porter expatiated upon the cases in the village, and on fever in general.

"I have tested the water in all the wells—perfectly pure. There can be nothing amiss with the milk, for all my patients are on Mrs. Greswold's list, and are getting their milk from your own dairy. The drainage is perfection — yet here we

have an outbreak of fever, which looks remarkably like typhoid?"

"Why not say at once that it is typhoid?"

"The symptoms all point that way."

"You say there can be nothing amiss with the milk. You have not analysed it, I suppose?"

"Why should I? Out of your own dairy, where everything is managed in the very best way—the perfection of cleanliness in every detail."

"You ought to have analysed the milk, all the same," said Greswold thoughtfully. "The strength of a chain is its weakest link. There may be some weak link here, though we cannot put our fingers upon it—yet. Are there many cases?"

"Let me see. There's Johnny Giles, and Mrs. Peter and her children, and Janet Dawson, and there's Andrew Rogers, and there's Mary Rainbow," began Mr. Porter, counting on his fingers as he went on, until the list of sufferers came to eleven. "Mostly youngsters," he said in conclusion.

"They ought to have been isolated," said Greswold. "I will get out plans for an infirmary to-morrow. There is the willow-field, on the other

side of the village, a ridge of high ground sloping down towards the parish drain, with a southern exposure, a capital site for a hospital. It is dreadful to think of fever-poison spreading from half-a-dozen different cottages. Which was the first case?"

"Little Rainbow."

"That fair-haired child whom I used to see from my dressing-room window every morning as she went away from the dairy, tottering under a pitcher of milk? Poor little Polly! She was a favourite with us all. Is she very ill?"

"Yes, I think hers is about the best case," answered the doctor unctuously; "the others are a little vague; but there's no doubt about *her*, all the symptoms strongly marked—a very clear case."

"Is there any danger of a fatal termination?"

"I'm afraid there is."

"Poor little Polly—poor pretty little girl! I used to know it was seven o'clock when I saw that bright little flaxen head flit by the yew hedge yonder. Polly was as good a timekeeper as any clock in the village. And you think she may die? You have not told Lola, I hope?"

"No, I have not let out anything about danger. Lola is only too anxious already."

"I will put the infirmary in hand to-morrow; and I will take my wife and daughter to Scotland on Tuesday."

"Upon my word, it will be a very good thing to get them away. These fever cases are so mysterious. There's no knowing what shape infection may take. I have the strongest belief in your system of drainage—"

"Nothing is perfect," said Greswold impatiently. "The science of sanitation is still in its infancy. I sometimes think we have not advanced very far from the knowledge of our ancestors, whose homes were desolated by the Black Death. However, don't let us talk, Porter. Let us act, if we can. Come and look at the dairy."

"You don't apprehend evil there?"

"There are three sources of typhoid poison—drainage, water, milk. You say the drains and the water are good, and that the milk comes from my own dairy. If you are right as to the first and

second, the third must be wrong, no matter whose dairy it may come from."

He took up his hat, and went out of the house with the doctor. Gardens and shrubberies stretched before them in all their luxuriance of summer verdure, gardens and shrubberies which had been the delight and pride of many generations of Greswolds, but loved more dearly by none than by George Greswold and his wife. In Mildred's mind the old family house was a part of her husband's individuality, an attribute rather than a mere possession. Every tree and every shrub was sacred. These, his mother's own hands had cropped and tended; those, grandfathers and great-grandfathers and *arrière* great-grandfathers had planted in epochs that distance has made romantic.

On the right of the hall-door a broad gravel path led in a serpentine sweep towards the stables, a long, low building spread over a considerable area, and hidden by shrubberies. The dairy was a little further off, approached by a winding walk through thickets of laurel and arbutus. It had been originally a barn, and was used as a receptacle for all

manner of out-of-door lumber when Mildred came to the Manor. She had converted the old stone building into a model dairy, with outside gallery and staircase of solid woodwork, and with a Swiss roof. Other buildings had been added. There were low cowhouses, and tall pigeon-houses, and a picturesque variety of gables and elevations which was delightful to the eye, seen on a summer afternoon such as this June Sunday, amidst the perfume of clove carnations and old English roses, and the cooing of doves.

Mrs. Greswold's Channel Island cows were her delight—creatures with cream-coloured coats, black noses, and wistful brown eyes. Scarcely a day passed on which she did not waste an hour or so in the cowhouses or in the meadows caressing these favourites. Each cow had her name painted in blue and white above her stall, and the chief, or duchess of the herd, was very severe in the maintenance of cowhouse precedence, and knew how to resent the insolence of a new-comer who should presume to cross the threshold in advance of her.

The dairy itself had a solemn and shadowy air,

like a shrine, and was as pretty as the dairy at Frogmore. The walls were lined with Minton tiles, the shallow milk-pans were of Doulton pottery, and quaintly-shaped pitchers of bright colours were ranged on china brackets along the walls. The windows were latticed, and a pane of ruby, rose, or amethyst appeared here and there among the old bottle-green glass, and cast a patch of coloured light upon the cool marble slab below.

The chief dairy-woman lived at an old-fashioned cottage on the premises, with her husband, the cow-keeper; and their garden, which lay at the back of the cowhouses and dairy, was the ideal old English garden, in which flowers and fruit strive for the mastery. In a corner of this garden, close to the outer offices of the cottage, among rows of peas, and summer cabbages, and great overgrown lavender-bushes and moss-roses, stood the old well, with its crumbling brick border and ancient spindle, a well that had been dug when the old manor-house was new.

There were other water arrangements for Mrs. Greswold's dairy, a new artesian well, on a hill a

quarter of a mile from the kitchen-garden, a well that went deep down into the chalk, and was famous for the purity of its water. All the drinking-water of the house was supplied from this well, and the water was laid on in iron pipes to dairy and cow-houses. All the vessels used for milk or cream were washed in this water; at least, such were Mr. Greswold's strict orders—orders supposed to be carried out under the supervision of his bailiff and housekeeper.

Mr. Porter looked at a reeking heap of stable manure that sprawled within twenty feet of the old well with suspicion in his eye, and from the manure-heap he looked at the back premises of the old cob-walled cottage.

"I'm afraid there may have been soakage from that manure-heap into the well," he said; "and if your dairy vessels are washed in that water—"

"But they never are," interrupted Mr. Greswold; "that water is used only for the garden—eh, Mrs. Wadman?"

The dairy-woman was standing on the threshold of her neat little kitchen, curtseying to her master,

resplendent in her Sunday gown of bright blue merino, and her Sunday brooch, containing her husband's photograph, coloured out of knowledge.

"No, of course not, sir; leastways, never except when there was something wrong with the pipes from the artesian."

"Something wrong; when was that? I never heard of anything wrong."

"Well, sir, my husband didn't want to be troublesome, and Mr. Thomas he gave the order for the men from Romsey, that was on the Saturday after working-hours, and they was to come as it might be on the Monday morning, and they never come near; and Mr. Thomas he wrote and wrote, and my husband he says it ain't no use writing, and he takes the pony and rides over to Romsey in his overtime, and he complains about the men not coming, and they tells him there's a big job on at Broadlands and not a plumber to be had for love or money; but the pipes is all right *now*, sir."

"Now? Since when have they been in working order?"

"Since yesterday, sir. Mr. Thomas was determined he'd have everything right before you came back."

"And how long have you been using that water," pointing to the well, with its moss-grown brickwork and flaunting margin of yellow stonecrop, "for dairy purposes?"

"Well, you see, sir, we was obliged to use water of some kind; and there ain't purer or better water than that for twenty mile round. I always use it for my kettle every time I make tea for me or my master, and never found no harm from it in the last fifteen years."

"How long have you used it for the dairy?" repeated George Greswold angrily; "can't you give a straight answer, woman?"

Mrs. Wadman could not: had never achieved a direct reply to a plain question within the memory of man.

"The men was to have come on the Monday morning, first thing," she said, "and they didn't come till the Tuesday week after that, and then they was that slow—"

George Greswold walked up and down the garden path, raging.

"She won't answer!" he cried. "Was it a week —a fortnight—three weeks ago that you began to use that water for your dairy?" he asked sternly; and gradually he and the doctor induced her to acknowledge that the garden well had been in use for the dairy nearly three weeks before yesterday.

"Then that is enough to account for everything," said Dr. Porter. "First there is filtration of manure through a gravelly soil—inevitable—and next there is something worse. She had her sister here from Salisbury—six weeks ago—down with typhoid fever three days after she came—brought it from Salisbury."

"Yes, yes—I remember. You told me there was no danger of infection."

"There need have been none. I made her use all precautions possible in an old-fashioned cottage; but however careful she might be, there would be always the risk of a well—close at hand like that one—getting tainted. I asked her if she ever used

that water for anything but the garden, and she said no, the artesian well supplied every want. And now she talks about her kettle, and tells us coolly that she has been using that polluted water for the last three weeks—and poisoning a whole village."

"Me poisoning the village! O Dr. Porter, how can you say such a cruel thing? Me, that wouldn't hurt a fly if I knew it!"

"Perhaps not, Mrs. Wadman; but I'm afraid you've hurt a good many of your neighbours without knowing it."

George Greswold stood in the pathway silent and deadly pale. He had been so happy for the last thirteen years—a sky without a cloud—and now in a moment the clouds were closing round him, and again all might be darkness, as it had been once before in his life. Calamity for which he felt himself unaccountable had come upon him before—swift as an arrow from the bow—and now again he stood helpless, smitten by the hand of Fate.

He thought of the little village child, with her guileless face, looking up at his window as she tripped by with her pitcher. His dole of milk had

been fatal to the simple souls who had looked up to him as a Providence. He had taken such pains that all should be sweet and wholesome in his people's cottages; he had spent money like water, and had lectured them and taught them; and lo! from his own luxurious home the evil had gone forth. Careless servants, hushing up a difficulty, loth to approach him with plain facts lest they should be considered troublesome, had wrought this evil, had spread disease and death in the land.

And his own and only child, the delight of his life, the apple of his eye—that tainted milk had been served at her table! Amidst all that grace of porcelain and flowers the poison had lurked, as at the cottagers' board. What if she, too, should suffer?

He meant to take her away in a day or two—now—now when the cause of evil was at work no longer. The thought that it might be too late, that the germ of poison might lurk in the heart of that fair flower, filled him with despair.

Mrs. Wadman had run into her cottage, shedding indignant tears at Dr. Porter's cruelty. She came

out again, with a triumphant air, carrying a tumbler of water.

"Just look at it, sir," she said; "look how bright and clear it is. There never was better water."

"My good woman, in this case brightness and clearness mean corruption," said the doctor. "If you'll give me a pint of that water in a bottle I'll take it home with me, and test it before I sleep to-night."

CHAPTER VI.

"AH! PITY! THE LILY IS WITHERED."

GEORGE GRESWOLD left the dairy-garden like a man stricken to death. He felt as if the hand of Fate were on him. It was not his fault that this evil had come upon him, that these poor people whom he had tried to help suffered by his bounty, and were perhaps to die for it. He had done all that human foresight could do; but the blind folly of his servants had stultified his efforts. Nothing in a London slum could have been worse than this evil which had come about in a gentleman's ornamental dairy, upon premises where money had been lavished to secure the perfection of scientific sanitation.

Mr. Porter murmured some hopeful remark as they went back to the house.

"Don't talk about it, Porter," Greswold answered impatiently; "nothing could be worse—nothing. Do all you can for these poor people—

your uttermost, mind, your uttermost. Spare neither time nor money. Save them, if you can."

"You may be assured I shall do my best. There are only three or four very bad cases."

"Three or four! My God, how horrible! Three or four people murdered by the idiocy of my servants."

"Joe Stanning—not much chance for him, I'm afraid—and Polly Rainbow."

"Polly—poor pretty little Polly! O Porter, you *must* save her! You must perform a miracle, man. That is what genius means in a doctor. The man of genius does something that all other doctors have pronounced impossible. You will have Hutchinson over to-morrow. He may be able to help you."

"If she live till to-morrow. I'm afraid it's a question of a few hours."

George Greswold groaned aloud.

"And my daughter has been drinking the same tainted milk. Will she be stricken, do you think?" he asked, with an awful calmness.

"God forbid! Lola has such a fine constitution

and the antecedent circumstances are different. I'll go and have a look at my patients, and come back to you late in the evening with the last news."

They parted by a little gate at the corner of a thick yew hedge, which admitted Mr. Greswold into his wife's flower-garden: a very old garden, which had been the care and delight of many generations; a large square garden, with broad flower-beds on each side, a stone sundial in the centre of a grass-plot, and a buttressed wall at the end, a massive old wall of vermilion brickwork, honeycombed by the decay of centuries, against which a double rank of hollyhocks made a particoloured screen, while flaunting dragon's-mouth and yellow stonecrop made a flame of colour on the top.

There was an old stone summer-house in each angle of that end wall, temples open to the sun and air, and raised upon three marble steps, stained with moss and lichen.

Charming as these antique retreats were to muse or read in, Mildred Greswold preferred taking tea on the lawn, in the shadow of the two old cedars. She was sitting in a low garden-chair, with a Japanese

tea-table at her side, and a volume of Robertson's sermons on her lap.

It was a rule of life at Enderby Manor that only books of pious tendency should be read on Sundays. The Sunday library was varied and well chosen. Nobody ever found the books dull or the day too long. The dedication of that one day in seven to godliness and good works had never been an oppression to Mildred Greswold.

She remembered her mother's Sundays—days of hasty church, and slow elaborate dressing for afternoon or evening gaieties; days of church parade and much praise of other people's gowns and depreciation of other people's conduct; days of gadding about and running from place to place; Sunday luncheons, Sunday musical parties, Sunday expeditions up the river, Sunday in the studios, Sunday at Richmond or Greenwich. Mrs. Greswold remembered the fussy emptiness of that fashionable Sunday, and preferred sermons and tranquil solitude in the manor gardens.

Solitude meant a trinity of domestic love. Husband, wife, and daughter spent their Sundays

together. Those were blessed days for the wife and daughter, since there were no business engagements, no quarter-sessions, or interviews with the bailiff, or letter-writing, to rob them of the society they both loved best in the world. George Greswold devoted his Sundays entirely to his Creator and his home.

"Where is Lola?" he asked, surprised to find his wife alone at this hour.

"She has a slight headache, and I persuaded her to lie down for an hour or so."

The father's face blanched. A word was enough in his overwrought condition.

"Porter must see her," he said; "and I have just let him leave me. I'll send some one after him."

"My dear George, it is nothing; only one of her usual headaches."

"You are sure she was not feverish?"

"I think not. It never occurred to me. She has often complained of headache since she began to grow so fast."

"Yes, she has shot up like a tall white lily—my lily!" murmured the father tenderly.

He sank into a chair, feeling helpless, hopeless almost, under that overpowering sense of fatality—of undeserved evil.

"Dear George, you look so ill this afternoon," said his wife, with tender anxiety, laying her hand on his shoulder, and looking earnestly at him, as he sat there in a downcast attitude, his arms hanging loosely, his eyes bent upon the ground. "I'm afraid the heat has overcome you."

"Yes, it has been very hot. Do me a favour, Mildred. Go into the house, and send somebody to find Porter. He was going the round of the cottages where there are sick people. He can easily be found. I want him to see Lola, at once."

"I'll send after him, George; but, indeed, I don't see any need for a doctor. Lola is so strong; her headaches pass like summer clouds. O George, you don't think that *she* is going to have fever, like the cottagers!" cried Mildred, full of a sudden terror.

"No, no; of course not. Why should she have the fever? But Porter might as well see her at once—at once. I hate delay in such cases."

His wife hurried away without a word. He had imbued her with all his own fears.

He sat in the garden, just as she had left him, motionless, benumbed with sorrow. There might, indeed, be no ground for this chilling fear; others might die, and his beloved might still go unscathed. But she had been subjected to the same poison, and at any moment the same symptoms might show themselves. For the next week or ten days he must be haunted by a hideous spectre. He would make haste to get his dearest one away to the strong fresh mountain air, to the salt breath of the German Ocean; but if the poison had already tainted that young life, mountain and sea could not save her from the fever. She must pass through the furnace, as those others were passing.

"Poor little Polly Rainbow! The only child of a widow; the only one; like mine," he said to himself.

He sat in the garden till dusk, brooding, praying dumbly, unutterably sad. The image of the widow of Nain was in his mind while he sat there. The humble funeral train, the mourning mother, and that divine face shining out of the little group of

peasant faces, radiant with intellect and faith—among them, but not of them—and the uplifted hand beckoning the dead man from the bier.

"The age of miracles is past," he thought: "there is no Saviour in the land to help *me*! In my day of darkness Heaven made no sign. I was left to suffer as the worms suffer under the ploughshare, and to wriggle back to life as best I could, like them."

It was growing towards the summer darkness when he rose and went into the house, where he questioned the butler, whom he met in the hall. Mr. Porter had been brought back, and had seen Miss Greswold. He had found her slightly feverish, and had ordered her to go to bed. Mrs. Greswold was sitting with her. Did Dr. Porter seem anxious? No, not at all anxious; but he was going to send Miss Laura some medicine before bedtime.

It was after nine now, but Greswold could not stay in the house. He wanted to know how it fared with his sick tenantry—most of all with the little flaxen-haired girl he had so often noticed of late.

He went out into the road that led to the village, a scattered colony, a cottage here and there, or a cluster of cottages and gardens on a bit of rising ground above the road. There was a common a little way from the Manor, a picturesque, irregular expanse of hollows and hillocks, skirted by a few cottages, and with a fir plantation shielding it from the north. Mrs. Rainbow's cottage stood between the common and the fir-wood, an old half-timbered cottage, very low, with a bedroom in the roof, and a curious dormer-window, with a thatched arch projecting above the lattice, like an overhanging eyebrow. The little garden was aflame with scarlet bean-blossom, roses, and geraniums, and the perfume of sweet-peas filled the air.

Greswold heard the doctor talking in the upper chamber as he stood by the gate. The deep, grave tones were audible in the evening stillness, and there was another sound that chilled the Squire's heart: the sound of a woman's suppressed weeping.

He waited at the gate. He had not the nerve to go into the cottage and face that sorrowing widow. It seemed to him as if the child's peril were his

ault. It was not enough that he had taken all reasonable precautions. He ought to have foreseen the idiocy of his servants. He ought to have been more on the alert to prevent evil.

The great round moon came slowly up out of a cluster of Scotch firs. How black the branches looked against that red light! Slowly, slowly gliding upward in a slanting line, the moon stole at the back of those black branches, and climbed into the open sky.

How often Lola had watched such a moonrise at his side, and with what keen eyes she had noted the beauty of the spectacle! It was not that he had trained her to observe and to feel the loveliness of nature. With her that feeling had been an instinct, born with her, going before the wisdom of maturity, the cultivated taste of travelled experience.

To-night she was lying in her darkened room, the poor head heavy and painful on the pillow. She would not see the moon rising slowly yonder in that cloudless sky.

"No matter; she will see it to-morrow, I hope," he said to himself, trying to be cheerful. "I am a

morbid fool to torment myself; she has been subject to headaches of late. Mildred is right."

And then he remembered that death and sorrow were near—close to him as he stood there watching the moon. He remembered poor little Polly Rainbow, and desponded again.

A woman's agonised cry broke the soft summer stillness, and pierced George Greswold's heart.

"The child is dead!" he thought.

Yes, poor little Polly was gone. The widow came out to the gate presently, sobbing piteously, and clasped Mr. Greswold's hand and cried over it, broken down by her despair, leaning against the gate-post, as if her limbs had lost the power to bear her up.

"O, sir, she was my all!" she sobbed; "she was my all!"

She could say no more than this, but kept repeating it again and again. "She was all I had in the world; the only thing I cared for."

George Greswold touched her shoulder with protecting gentleness. There was not a peasant in the village for whom he had not infinite tenderness—

pitying their infirmities, forgiving their errors, inexhaustible in benevolence towards them all. He had set himself to make his dependents happy as the first duty of his position. And yet he had done them evil unwittingly. He had cost this poor widow her dearest treasure—her one ewe lamb.

"Bear up, if you can, my good soul," he said; "I know that it is hard."

"Ah, sir, you'd know it better if it was your young lady that was stricken down!" exclaimed the widow bitterly; and the Squire walked away from the cottage-gate without another word.

Yes, he would know it better then. His heart was heavy enough now. What would it be like if *she* were smitten?

She was much the same next day: languid, with an aching head and some fever. She was not very feverish. On the whole, the doctor was hopeful, or he pretended to be so. He could give no positive opinion yet, nor could Dr. Hutchinson. They were both agreed upon that point; and they were agreed that the polluted water in the garden well had been

the cause of the village epidemic. Analysis had shown that it was charged with poisonous gas.

Mr. Greswold hastened his preparations for the journey to Scotland with a feverish eagerness. He wrote to engage a sleeping-carriage on the Great Northern. They were to travel on Thursday, leaving home before noon, dining in town, and starting for the North in the evening. If Lola's illness were indeed the slight indisposition which everybody hoped it was, she might be quite able to travel on Thursday, and the change of air and the movement would do her good.

"She is always so well in Scotland," said her father.

No, there did not seem much amiss with her. She was very sweet, and even cheerful, when her father went into her room to sit beside her bed for a quarter of an hour or so. The doctors had ordered that she should be kept very quiet, and a hospital nurse had been fetched from Salisbury to sit up at night with her. There was no necessity for such care, but it was well to do even a little too much where so cherished a life was at stake. People had

but to look at the father's face to know how precious that frail existence was to him. Nor was it less dear to the mother; but she seemed less apprehensive, less bowed down by gloomy forebodings.

Yes, Lola was quite cheerful for those few minutes in which her father sat by her side. The strength of her love overcame her weakness. She forgot the pain in her head, the weariness of her limbs, while he was there. She questioned him about the villagers.

"How is little Polly going on?" she asked.

He dared not tell the truth. It would have hurt him too much to speak to her of death.

"She is going on very well; all is well, love," he said, deceiving her for the first time in his life.

This was on Tuesday, and the preparations for Scotland were still in progress. Mr. Greswold's talk with his daughter was all of their romantic Highland home, of the picnics and rambles, the fishing excursions and sketching parties they would have there. The nurse sat in a corner and listened to them with a grave countenance, and would not

allow Mr. Greswold more than ten minutes with his daughter.

He counted the hours till they should be on the road for the North. There would be the rest of Tuesday and all Wednesday. She would be up and dressed on Wednesday, no doubt; and on Thursday morning the good old gray carriage-horses would take them all off to Romsey Station—such a pretty drive on a summer morning, by fields and copses, with changeful glimpses of the silvery Test.

Dr. Hutchinson came on Tuesday evening, and found his patient not quite so well. There was a long conference between the two doctors, and then the nurse was called in to receive her instructions; and then Mr. Greswold was told that the journey to Scotland must be put off for a fortnight at the very least.

He received the sentence as if it had been his death-warrant. He asked no questions. He dared not. A second nurse was to be sent over from Southampton next morning. The two doctors had the cool, determined air of men who are preparing for a battle.

Lola was light-headed next morning; but with intervals of calmness and consciousness. She heard the church bell tolling, and asked what it meant.

"It's for Polly Rainbow's funeral," answered the maid who was tidying the room.

"O, no," cried Lola, "that can't be! Father said she was better."

And then her mind began to wander, and she talked of Polly Rainbow as if the child had been in the room: talked of the little girl's lessons at the parish school, and of a prize that she was to get.

After that all was darkness, all was despair—a seemingly inevitable progress from bad to worse. Science, care, love, prayers—all were futile; and the bell that had tolled for the widow's only child tolled ten days afterwards for Lola.

It seemed to George Greswold as those slow strokes beat upon his brain, heavily, heavily, like minute guns, that all the hopes and cares and joys and expectations life had held for him were over. His wife was on her knees in the darkened house from which the funeral train was slowly moving,

and he had loved her passionately; and yet it seemed to him as if the open car yonder, with its coffin hidden under snow-white blossoms, was carrying away all that had ever been precious to him upon this earth.

"She was the morning, with its promise of day," he said to himself. "She was the springtime, with its promise of summer. While I had her I lived in the future; henceforward I can only live in the present. I dare not look back upon the past!"

CHAPTER VII.

DRIFTING APART.

George Greswold and his wife spent the rest of that fatal year in a villa on the Lake of Thun, an Italian villa, with a campanello tower, and a long white colonnade, and stone balconies overhanging lawn and gardens, where the flowers grew in a riotous profusion. The villa was midway between two of the boat-stations, and there was no other house near, and this loneliness was its chief charm for those two heart-broken mourners. They yearned for no sympathy, they cared for no companionship—hardly even for that of each other, close as the bond of love had been till now. Each seemed to desire above all things to be alone with that great grief—to hug that dear, sad memory in silence and solitude. Only to see them from a distance, from the boat yonder, as it glided swiftly past that flowery lawn, an observer would have guessed at sorrow

and bereavement from the mere attitude of either mourner—the man sitting with his head bent forward, brooding on the ground, the unread newspaper lying across his knee; the woman on the other side of the lawn, beyond speaking distance, half reclining in a low basket-chair, with her hands clasped above her head, gazing at the distant line of snow mountains in listless vacancy. The huge tan-coloured St. Bernard, snapping with his great cavern-like jaws at infinitesimal flies, was the only object that gave life to the picture.

The boats went by in sunshine and cloud, the boats went by under torrential rain, which seemed to fuse lake and mountains, villas and gardens, into one watery chaos; the boats went by, and the days passed like the boats, and made no difference in the lives of those two mourners. Nothing could ever make any difference to either of them for evermore, it seemed to Mildred. It was as if some spring had broken in the machinery of life. Even love seemed dead.

"And yet he was once so fond of me, and I of him," thought the wife, watching her husband's

face, with its curious look of absence—the look of a window with the blind down.

There were times when that look of utter abstraction almost frightened Mildred Greswold. It was an expression she had seen occasionally during her daughter's lifetime, and which had always made her anxious. It was the look about which Lola used to say when they all met at the breakfast-table,

"Papa has had his bad dream again."

That bad dream was no invention of Lola's, but a stern reality in George Greswold's life. He would start up from his pillow in an agony, muttering broken sentences in that voice of the sleeper which seems always different from his natural voice—as if he belonged to another world. Cold beads of sweat would start out upon his forehead, and the wife would put her arms round him and soothe him as a mother soothes her frightened child, until the muttering ceased and he sank upon his pillow exhausted, to lapse into quiet sleep, or else awoke and recovered calmness in awakening.

The dream—whatever it was—always left its

mark upon him next day. It was a kind of nightmare, he told his wife, when she gently questioned him, not urging her questions lest there should be pain in the mere recollection of that horrid vision. He could give no graphic description of that dream. It was all confusion—a blurred and troubled picture; but that confusion was in itself agony.

Rarely were his mutterings intelligible; rarely did his wife catch half-a-dozen consecutive words from those broken sentences; but once she heard him say,

"The cage—the cage again—iron bars—like a wild beast!"

And now that absent and cloudy look which she had seen in her husband's face after the bad dream was there often. She spoke to him sometimes, and he did not hear. She repeated the same question twice or thrice, in her soft low voice, standing close beside him, and he did not answer. There were times when it was difficult to arouse him from that deep abstraction; and at such times the utter blankness and solitude of her own life weighed upon her like a dead weight, an almost unbearable burden.

"What is to become of us both in all the long years before us?" she thought despairingly. "Are we to be always far apart—living in the same house, spending all our days together, and yet divided?"

She had married before she was eighteen, and at one-and-thirty was still in the bloom of womanhood, younger than most women of that age; for her life had been subject to none of those vicissitudes and fevers which age women of the world. She had never kept a secret from her husband, never trembled at opening a milliner's account, or blushed at the delivery of a surreptitious letter. The struggles for preëminence, the social race in which some women waste their energies and strain their nerves, were unknown to her. She had lived at Enderby Manor as the flowers lived, rejoicing in the air and the sunshine, drinking out of a cup of life in which there mingled no drop of poison. Thus it was that not one line upon the transparent skin marked the passage of a decade. The violet eyes had the limpid purity, and the emotional lips had the tender carnation, of girlhood. Mildred Greswold was as beauti-

ful at thirty-one as Mildred Fausset had been at seventeen. And yet it seemed to her that life was over, and that her husband had ceased to care for her.

Many and many an hour in that lovely solitude beside the lake she sat with hands loosely clasped in her lap or above her head, with her books lying forgotten at her feet—all the newest books that librarians could send to tempt the jaded appetite of the reader—and her eyes gazing vacantly over the blue of the lake or towards the snow-peaks on the horizon. Often in these silent musings she recalled the past, and looked at the days that were gone as at a picture.

She remembered just such an autumn as this, a peerless autumn spent with her father at The Hook —spent for the most part on the river and in the garden, the sunny days and moonlit nights being far too lovely for any one to waste indoors. Her seventeenth birthday was not long past. It was just ten years since she had come home to that house to find Fay had vanished from it, and to shed bitter tears for the loss of her companion. Never

since that time had she seen Fay's face. Her questions had been met coldly or angrily by her mother; and even her father had answered her with unsatisfactory brevity.

All she could learn was that Fay had been sent to complete her education at a finishing-school at Brussels.

"At school! O, poor Fay! I hope she is happy."

"She ought to be," Mrs. Fausset answered peevishly. "The school is horridly expensive. I saw one of the bills the other day. Simply *enormous*. The girls are taken to the opera, and have all sorts of absurd indulgences."

"Still, it is only school, mother, not home," said Mildred compassionately.

This was two years after Fay had vanished. No letter had ever come from her to Mildred, though Mildred was able to write now, in her own sprawling childish fashion, and would have been delighted to answer any such letter. She had herself indited various epistles to her friend, but had not succeeded in getting them posted. They had drifted to the

waste-paper basket, mute evidences of wasted affection.

As each holiday time came round the child asked if Fay were coming home, always to receive the same saddening negative.

One day, when she had been more urgent than usual, Mrs. Fausset lost temper and answered sharply,

"No, she is not coming. She is never coming. I don't like her, and I don't intend ever to have her in any house of mine, so you may as well leave off plaguing me about her."

"But, mother, why don't you like her?"

"Never mind why. I don't like her. That is enough for you to know."

"But, mother, if she is father's daughter and my sister, you ought to like her," pleaded Mildred, very much in earnest.

"How dare you say that! You must never say it again—you are a naughty, cruel child to say such things!" exclaimed Mrs. Fausset, beginning to cry.

"Why naughty? why cruel? O, mother!" and Mildred cried too.

She clasped her arms round her mother's neck and sobbed aloud.

"Dear mother, indeed I'm not naughty," she protested, "but Bell said Fay was papa's daughter. 'Of course she's his daughter,' Bell said; and if she's father's daughter, she's my sister, and it's wicked not to love one's sister. The psalm I was learning yesterday says so, mother. 'Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" And it means sisters just the same, Miss Colville said, when I asked her; and I do love Fay. I can't help loving her."

"You must never speak her name again to me," said Mrs. Fausset resolutely. "I shall leave off loving you if you pester me about that odious girl!"

"Then wasn't it true what Bell said?"

"Of course not."

"Mother, would it be wrong for papa to have a daughter?" asked Mildred, perplexed by this mysterious resentment for which she could understand no cause,

"Wrong! It would be *infamous*."

"Would God be angry?" asked the child, with an awe-stricken look. "Would it be wicked?"

"It would be the worst possible insult to *me*," said Lord Castle-Connell's daughter, ignoring the minor question.

After this Mildred refrained from all further speech about the absent girl to her mother; but as the years went by she questioned her father from time to time as to Fay's whereabouts.

"She is very well off, my dear. You need not make yourself unhappy about her. She is with a very nice family, and has pleasant surroundings."

"Shall I never see her again, father?"

"Never's a long day, Mildred. I'll take you to see her by and by when there is an opportunity. You see, it happens unfortunately that your mother does not like her, so it is better she should not come here. It would not be pleasant for her—or for me."

He said this gravely, with a somewhat dejected look, and Mildred felt somehow that even to him it would be better to talk no more of her lost companion.

As the years went by Mrs. Fausset changed from a woman of fashion to a nervous valetudinarian. It was not that she loved pleasure less, but her beauty and her health had both begun to dwindle and fade at an age when other women are in their prime. She fretted at the loss of her beauty—watched every wrinkle, counted every gray hair, lamented over every change in the delicate colouring which had been her chief charm.

"How pretty you are growing, Mildred!" she exclaimed once, with a discontented air, when Mildred was a tall slip of fourteen. "You are just what I was at your age. And you will grow prettier every day until you are thirty, and then I daresay you will begin to fade as I have done, and feel an old woman as I do."

It seemed to her that her own charms dwindled as her daughter grew. As the bud unfolded, the flower faded. She felt almost as if Mildred had robbed her of her beauty. She would not give up the pleasures and excitement of society. She consulted half-a-dozen fashionable physicians, and would not obey one of them. They all prescribed the same

repulsive treatment—rest, early hours, country air, with gentle exercise; no parties, no excitement, no strong tea.

Mrs. Fausset disobeyed them all, and from only fancying herself ill grew to be really ill; and from chronic lassitude developed organic disease of the heart.

She lingered nearly two years, a confirmed invalid, suffering a good deal, and giving other people a great deal of trouble. She died soon after Mildred's sixteenth birthday, and on her death-bed she confided freely in her daughter, who had attended upon her devotedly all through her illness, neglecting everything else in the world for her mother's sake.

"You are old enough to understand things that must once have seemed very mysterious to you, Mildred," said Mrs. Fausset, lying half-hidden in the shadow of guipure bed-curtains, with her daughter's hand clasped in hers, perhaps forgetting how young that daughter was in her own yearning for sympathy. "You couldn't make out why I disliked that horrid girl so much, could you?"

"No, indeed, mother."

"I hated her because she was your father's daughter, Mildred—his natural daughter; the child of some woman who was not his wife. You are old enough now to know what that means. You were reading *The Heart of Midlothian* to me last week. You know, Mildred?"

Yes, Mildred knew. She hung her head at the memory of that sad story, and at the thought that her father might have sinned like George Staunton.

"Yes, Mildred, she was the child of some woman he loved before he married me. He must have been desperately in love with the woman, or he would never have brought her daughter into my house. It was the greatest insult he could offer to me."

"Was it, mother?"

"Was it? Why, of course it was. How stupid you are, child!" exclaimed the invalid peevishly, and the feverish hand grew hotter as she talked.

Mildred blushed crimson at the thought of this story of shame. Poor Fay! poor, unhappy Fay! And yet her strong common sense told her that there were two sides to the question.

"It was not Fay's fault, mother," she said gently. "No one could blame Fay, or be angry with *her*. And if the—wicked woman was dead, and father had repented, and was sorry, was it very wrong for him to bring my sister home to us?"

"Don't call her your sister!" exclaimed Mrs. Fausset, with a feeble scream of angry alarm; "she is not your sister—she is no relation—she is nothing to you. It was an insult to bring her across my threshold. You must be very stupid, or you must care very little for *me*, if you can't understand that. His conduct proved that he had cared for that low, common woman—Fay's mother—more than ever he cared for me; perhaps he thought her prettier than me," said the invalid in hysterical parenthesis, "and I have never known a happy hour since."

"O, mamma dear, not in all the years when you used to wear such lovely gowns, and go to so many parties?" protested the voice of common sense.

"I only craved for excitement because I was miserable at heart. I don't think you can half understand a wife's feelings, Mildred, or you wouldn't say such foolish things. I wanted you to know this

before my death. I want you to remember it always, and if you meet that odious girl avoid her as you would a pestilence. If your father should attempt to bring her here, or to Parchment Street, after I am gone—"

"He will not, mother. He will respect your wishes too much—he will be too sorry," exclaimed Mildred, bending down to kiss the hot, dry hand, and moistening it with her tears.

The year of mourning that began soon after this conversation was a very quiet interval for father and daughter. They travelled a little, spent six months in Leipsic, where Mildred studied the piano under the most approved masters, a couple of months in Paris, where her father showed her all the lions in a tranquil, leisurely way that was very pleasant; and then they went down to The Hook, and lived there in happy idleness on the river and in the gardens all through a long and lovely summer.

Both were saddened at the sight of an empty chair—one sacred corner in all the prettiest rooms —where Maud Fausset had been wont to sit, a

graceful languid figure, robed in white, or some pale delicate hue even more beautiful than white in contrast with the background of palms and flowers, Japanese screen or Indian curtain. How pretty she had looked sitting there, with books and scent-bottles, and dainty satin-lined basket full of some light frivolous work, which progressed by stages of half-a-dozen stitches a day! Her fans, her Tennyson, her palms, and perfumes—all had savoured of her own fragile bright-coloured loveliness. She was gone; and father and daughter were alone together—deeply attached to each other, yet with a secret between them, a secret which made a darkening shadow across the lives of both.

Whenever John Fausset wore a look of troubled thought Mildred fancied he was brooding upon the past, thinking of that erring woman who had borne him a child, the child he had tried to fuse into his own family, and to whom her own childish heart had yearned as to a sister.

"It must have been instinct that made me love her," she said to herself; and then she would wonder idly what the fair sinner who had been Fay's mother

was like, and whether her father had really cared more for that frail woman than for his lawful wife.

"Poor pretty mamma! he seemed to doat upon her," thought Mildred. "I cannot imagine his ever having loved any one so well. I cannot imagine his ever having cared for any other woman in this world."

The formless image of that unknown woman haunted the girl's imagination. She appeared sometimes with one aspect, sometimes another—darkly beautiful, of Oriental type, like Scott's Rebecca, or fair and lowly-born like Effie Deans—poor fragile Effie, fated to fall at the first temptation. Poetry and fiction were full of suggestions about that unknown influence in her father's life; but every thought of the past ended in a sigh of pity for that fair wife whose domestic happiness had been clouded over by that half-discovered mystery.

Never a word did she breathe to her father upon this forbidden subject; never a word to Bell, who was still at the head of affairs in both Mr. Fausset's houses, and who looked like a grim and stony repository of family secrets.

CHAPTER VIII.

"SUCH THINGS WERE."

MILDRED had been motherless for a year when that new love began to grow which was to be stronger and closer than the love of mother or father, and which was to take possession of her life hereafter and transplant her to a new soil.

How well she remembered that summer afternoon on which she and George Greswold met for the first time!—she a girl of seventeen, fresh, simple-minded, untainted by that life of fashion and frivolity which she had seen only from the outside, looking on as a child at the follies of men and women—he her senior by thirteen years, and serious beyond his age. Her father and his father had been companions at the University, as undergraduates, with full purses and a mutual delight in fox-hunting and tandem-driving; and it was this old Oxford friendship which was the cause of George Greswold's appearance at

The Hook on that particular summer afternoon. Mr. Fausset had met him on a house-boat at Henley Regatta, had been moved by the memory of the past on discovering that Greswold was the son of George Ransome of Magdalen, and had brought his friend's son home to introduce to his daughter. It was not altogether without ulterior thought, perhaps, that he introduced George Greswold into his home. He had a theory that the young men of this latter day were for the most part a weak-kneed and degenerate race; and it had seemed to him that this tall, broad-shouldered young man with the marked features, dark eyes, and powerful brow was of a stronger type than the average bachelor.

"A pity that he is rather too old for Mildred," he said to himself, supposing that his daughter would hardly feel interested in a man who was more than five-and-twenty.

Mildred could recall his face as she saw it for the first time, to-day in her desolation, sitting idly beside the lake, while the rhythmical beat of the paddle-wheels died away in the distance. That grave dark face impressed her at once with a sense

of power. She did not think the stranger handsome, or fascinating, or aristocratic, or elegant; but she thought of him a great deal, and she was silent and shy in his presence, let him come as often as he might.

He was in mourning for his mother, to whom he had been deeply attached, and who had died within the last three months, leaving him Enderby Manor and a large fortune. His home life had not been happy. There had been an antagonism between him and his father from his boyhood upwards, and he had shaken the dust of the paternal house off his feet, and had left England to wander aimlessly, living on a small income allowed him by his mother, and making a little money by literature. He was a second son, a person of no importance, except to the mother, who doted upon him.

Happily for this younger son his mother was a woman of fortune, and on her death George Ransome inherited Enderby Manor, the old house in which generations of Greswolds had come and gone since Dutch William was King of England. There had been a much older house pulled down to make

room for that red brick mansion, and the Greswolds had been lords of the soil since the Wars of the Roses—red-rose to the heart's core, and loyal to an unfortunate king, whether Plantagenet, Tudor, or Stuart.

By the conditions of his mother's will, George Ransome assumed her family name and arms, and became George Ransome Greswold in all legal documents henceforward; but he signed himself George Greswold, and was known to his friends by that name. He had not loved his father nor his father's race.

He came to The Hook often in that glorious summer weather. At the first he was grave and silent, and seemed oppressed by sad memories; but this seemed natural in one who had so lately lost a beloved parent. Gradually the ice melted, and his manner brightened. He came without being bidden. He contrived to make himself, as it were, a member of the family, whose appearance surprised nobody. He bought a steam-launch, which was always at Mr. Fausset's disposal, and Miss Fausset went everywhere with her father. She recalled those sunlit

days now, with every impression of the moment; the ever-growing sense of happiness; the silent delight in knowing herself beloved; the deepening reverence for the man who loved her; the limitless faith in his power of heart and brain; the confiding love which felt a protection in the very sound of his voice. Yes, those had been happy days—the rosy dawning of a great joy that was to last until the grave, Mildred Fausset had thought; and now, after thirteen years of wedded love, they had drifted apart. Sorrow, which should have drawn them nearer together, had served only to divide them.

"O, my lamb, if you could know in your heavenly home how much your loss has cost us!" thought the mother, with the image of that beloved child before her eyes.

There had been a gloomy reserve in George Greswold's grief which had held his wife at a distance, and had wounded her sorrowful heart. He was selfish in his sorrow, forgetting that her loss was as great as his. He had bowed his head before inexorable Fate, had sat down in dust and ashes, and brooded over his bereavement, solitary, despairing.

If he did not curse God in his anguish, it was because early teaching still prevailed, and the habits of thought he had learned in childhood were not lightly to be flung off. Upon one side of his character he was a Pagan, seeing in this affliction the hand of Nemesis, the blind Avenger.

They left Switzerland in the late autumn, and wintered in Vienna, where Mr. Greswold gave himself up to study, and where neither he nor his wife took any part in the gaieties of the capital. Here they lived until the spring, and then, even in the depths of his gloom, a yearning came upon George Greswold to see the home of his race, the manor which he had loved as if it were a living thing.

"Mildred, do you think you could bear to be in the old home again?" he asked his wife suddenly, one morning at breakfast.

"I could bear anything better than the life we lead here," she answered, her eyes filling with tears.

"We will go back, then—yes, even if it is only to look upon our daughter's grave."

They went back to England and to Enderby Manor within a week after that conversation. They

arrived at Romsey Station one bright May afternoon, and found the gray horses waiting to carry them to the old house. How sad and strange it seemed to be coming home without Lola! She had always been their companion in such journeys, and her eager face and glad young voice, on the alert to recognise the first familiar points of the landscape, hill-top, or tree, or cottage that indicated home, had given an air of gaiety to every-day life.

The old horses took them back to the Manor, but not the old coachman. A great change in the household had come about after Lola's funeral. George Greswold had been merciless to those servants whose carelessness had brought about that great calamity, which made seven new graves in the churchyard before all was done. He dismissed his bailiff, Mrs. Wadman and her husband, an under-dairymaid and a cowman, and his housekeeper, all of whom he considered accountable for the use of that foul water from the old well—accountable, inasmuch as they had given him no notice of the evil, and had exercised no care or common sense in their management of the dairy. These he dismissed

sternly, and that party feeling which rules among servants took this severity amiss, and several other members of the household gave warning.

"Let it be a clean sweep, then," said Mr. Greswold to Bell, who announced the falling-away of his old servants. "Let there be none of the old faces here when we come back next year—except yours. There will be plenty of time for you to get new people."

"A clean sweep" suited Bell's temper admirably. To engage new servants who should owe their places to her, and bow themselves down before her, was a delight to the old Irishwoman.

Thus it was that all things had a strange aspect when Mildred Greswold reëntered her old home. Even the rooms had a different air. The new servants had arranged the furniture upon new lines, not knowing that old order which had been a part of daily life.

Let us go and look at *her* rooms first," said Mildred softly; and husband and wife went silently to the rooms in the south wing—the octagon-room with its dwarf bookcases and bright bindings, its

proof-engravings after Landseer—pictures chosen by Lola herself. Here nothing was changed. Bell's own hands had kept all things in order. No unfamiliar touch had disturbed the relics of the dead.

Mrs. Greswold stayed in that once happy scene for nearly an hour. It was hard to realise that she and her daughter were never to be together again, they who had been almost inseparable—who had sat side by side by yonder window or yonder hearth in all the changes of the seasons. There was the piano at which they had played and sung together. The music-stand still contained the prettily-bound volumes—sonatinas by Hummel and Clementi—easy duets by Mozart, national melodies, Volks-Lieder. In music the child had been in advance of her years. With the mother music was a passion, and she had imbued her daughter with her own tastes in all things. The child's nature had been a carrying on and completing of the mother's character, a development of all the mother's gifts.

She was gone, and the mother's life seemed desolate and empty—the future a blank. Never in

her life had she so much needed her husband's love —active, considerate, sympathetic—and yet never had he seemed so far apart from her. It was not that he was unkind or neglectful, it was only that his heart made no movement towards hers; he was not in sympathy with her. He had wrapped himself in his grief as in a mantle; he stood aloof from her, and seemed never to have understood that her sorrow was as great as his own.

He left her on the threshold of Lola's room. It might be that he could not endure the sight of those things which she had looked at weeping, in an ecstasy of grief. To her that agony of touch and memory, the aspect of things that belonged to the past, seemed to bring her lost child nearer to her— it was as if she stretched her hands across the gulf and touched those vanished hands.

"Poor piano!" she sighed; "poor piano, that she loved."

She touched the keys softly, playing the opening bars of *La ci darem la mano*. It was the first melody they had played together, mother and child —arranged easily as a duet. Later they had sung

it together, the girl's voice clear as a bird's, and seeming to need training no more than a bird's voice. These things had been, and were all over.

"What shall I do with my life?" cried the mother despairingly; "what shall I do with all the days to come—now she is gone?"

She left those rooms at last, locking the doors behind her, and went out into the garden. The grand old cedars cast their broad shadows on the lawn. The rustic chairs and tables were there, as in the days gone by, when that velvet turf under the cedars had been Mrs. Greswold's summer parlour. Would she sit there ever again? she wondered: could she endure to sit there without Lola?

There was a private way from the Manor gardens into the churchyard, a short cut to church by which mother and daughter had gone twice on every Sunday ever since Lola was old enough to know what Sunday meant. She went by this path in the evening stillness to visit Lola's grave.

She gathered a few rosebuds as she went.

"Flowers for my blighted flower," she murmured softly.

All was still and solemn in the old churchyard shadowed by sombre yews—a churchyard of irregular levels and moss-grown monuments enclosed by rusty iron railings, and humbler headstones of crumbling stone covered over with an orange-coloured lichen which was like vegetable rust.

The names on these were for the most part illegible, the lettering of a fashion that has passed away ; but here and there a brand-new stone perked itself up among these old memorials with an assertive statement about the dead.

Lola's grave was marked by a large white marble cross, carved in *alto relievo* on the level slab. The inscription was of the simplest:

"Laura, the only child of George and Mildred Greswold, aged twelve."

There were no words of promise or of consolation upon the stone.

On one side of the grave there was a large mountain-ash, whose white blossoms and delicate leaves made a kind of temple above the marble

slab ; on the other, an ancient yew cast its denser shade. Mildred knelt down in the shadow, and let her head droop over the cold stone. There was a skylark singing in the blue vault high above the old Norman tower—a carol of joy and glad young life, as it seemed to Mildred, sitting in the dust. What a mockery that joyousness of spring-time and Nature seemed !

She knew not how long she had knelt there in silent grief when the branches rustled suddenly, as if a strong arm had parted them, and a man flung himself down heavily upon a turf-covered mound—a neglected, nameless grave—beside Lola's monument. She did not stir from her kneeling attitude, or lift her head to look at the new-comer, knowing that the mourner was her husband. She had heard his footsteps approaching, heavy and slow in the stillness of the place.

The trunk of the tree hid her from that other mourner as she knelt there. He thought himself alone; and, in the abandonment of that fancied solitude, he groaned aloud, as Job may have groaned, sitting among ashes.

"Judgment!" he cried, "judgment!" and then, after an interval of silence, he cried again, "judgment!"

That one word, so repeated, seemed to freeze all the blood in her veins. What did it mean, that exceeding bitter cry,

"Judgment!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE FACE IN THE CHURCH.

Two months had gone since that first visit to Lola's grave, when the husband and wife had knelt so near each other, and yet so far apart in the infinite mystery of human consciousness; he with his secret thoughts and secret woes, which she had never fathomed. He, unaware of her neighbourhood; she, chilled by a vague suspicion and sense of estrangement which had been growing upon her ever since her daughter's death.

It was summer again, the ripe full-blown summer of mid-July. The awful anniversary of their bereavement had passed in silence and prayer. All things at Enderby looked as they had looked in the years that were gone, except the faces of the servants, which were for the most part strange. That change of the household made a great change in life to people so conservative as George Greswold and his

wife; and the old home seemed so much the less like home because of that change. The Squire of Enderby felt that his popularity was lessened in the village for which he had done so much. His severe dealing with the offenders had pleased nobody, not even the sufferers from the epidemic, whose losses he had avenged. He had shown himself implacable; and there were many who said he had been unjust.

"It was hard upon Wadman and his wife to be turned off after twenty years' faithful service," said one of the villagers. "The Squire may go a long way before he'll get as good a bailiff as Thomas," said another.

For the first time since he had inherited the estate George Greswold felt himself surrounded by an atmosphere of discontent, and even dislike. His tenants seemed afraid of him, and were reticent and moody when he talked to them, which he did much seldomer than of old, making a great effort in order to appear interested in their affairs.

Mildred's life during those summer weeks, while the roses were opening and all the flowers succeeding each other in a procession of loveliness, had drifted

along like a slow dull stream that crawls through a desolate swamp. There was neither beauty nor colour in her existence; there was a sense of vacuity, an aching void. Nothing to hope for, nothing to look back upon.

She did not abandon herself slavishly to her sorrow. She tried to resume the life of duty which had once been so full of sweetness, so rich in its rewards for every service. She went about among the cottagers as of old; she visited the shabby gentilities on the fringe of the market town, the annuitants and struggling families, the poor widows and elderly spinsters, who had quite as much need of help as the cottagers, and whom it had always been her delight to encourage and sustain with friendliness and sympathy, as well as with delicate benefactions, gifts that never humiliated the recipient. She took up the thread of her work in the parish schools; she resumed her old interest in the church services and decorations, in the inevitable charity bazaar or organ-fund concert. She played her part in the parish so well that people began to say,

"Mrs. Greswold is getting over her loss."

In him the shock had left a deeper mark. His whole aspect was changed. He looked ten years older than before the coming of sorrow; and though people loved her better, they pitied him more.

"She has more occupations and pursuits to interest her," said Mr. Rollinson, the curate. "She is devoted to music, and that employs her mind."

Yes, music was her passion; but in these days of mourning even music was allied to pain. Every melody she played, every song she sang, recalled the child whose appreciation of that divine art had been far beyond her years. They had sung and played together. Often singing alone in the summer dusk, in that corner of the long drawing-room, where Lola's babyish chair still stood, she had started, fancying she heard that other voice mingling with her own—the sweet clear tones which had sounded seraphic even upon earth.

O, was she with the angels now; or was it all a fable, that fond vision of a fairer world and an angelic choir, singing before the great white throne? To have lost such a child was almost to believe in

the world of seraphim and cherubim, of angels and purified spirits. Where else could she be?

Husband and wife lived together, side by side, in a sad communion that seemed to lack the spirit of unity. The outward semblance of confiding affection was there, but there was something wanting. He was very good to her—as kind, as attentive, and considerate as in their first year of marriage; and yet there was something wanting.

She remembered what he had been when he came as a stranger to The Hook; and it seemed to her as if the glass of Time had been turned backwards for fourteen years, and that he was again just as he had been in those early days, when she had watched him, curiously interested in his character as in a mystery. He was too grave for a man of his years—and with a shade of gloom upon him that hinted at a more than common grief. He had been subject to lapses of abstraction, as if his mind had slipped back to some unhappy past. It was only when he had fallen in love and was wholly devoted to her that the shadow passed away, and he began to feel the joyousness of life and the fervour of

ardent hopes. Then the old character dropped off him like the serpent's slough, and he became as young as the youngest—boyish even in his frank felicity.

This memory of her first impressions about him was so strong with her that she could not help speaking of it one evening after dinner when she had been playing one of Beethoven's grandest adagios to him, and they were sitting in silence, she by the piano, he far away by an open window on a level with the shadowy lawn, where the great cedars rose black against the pale gray sky.

"George, do you remember my playing that adagio to you for the first time?"

"I remember you better than Beethoven. I could scarcely think of the music in those days for thinking so much of you."

"Ah, but the first time you heard me play that adagio was before you had begun to care for me—before you had cast your slough."

"What do you mean?"

"Before you had come out of your cloud of sad memories. When first you came to us you lived

only in the past. I doubt if you were more than half-conscious of our existence."

She could only distinguish his profile faintly defined against the evening gray as he sat beside the window. Had she seen the expression of his face, its look of infinite pain, she would hardly have pursued the subject.

"I had but lately lost my mother," he said gravely.

"Ah, but that was a grief which you did not hide from us. You did not shrink from our sympathy there. There was some other trouble, something that belonged to a remoter past, over which you brooded in secret. Yes, George, I know you had some secrets then—that divided us—and—and—" falteringly, with tears in her voice—"I think those old secrets are keeping us asunder now, when our grief should draw us nearer together."

She had left her place by the piano, and had gone to him as she spoke, and now she was on her knees beside him, clinging to him tearfully.

"George, trust me, love me," she pleaded.

"My beloved, do I not love you?" he protested

passionately, clasping her in his arms, kissing away her tears, soothing her as if she had been a child. "My dearest and best, from the first hour I awakened to a new life in your love my truth has never wavered, my heart has never known change."

"And yet you are changed—since our darling went—terribly changed."

"Do you wonder that I grieve for her?"

"No, but you grieve apart—you hold yourself aloof from me."

"If I do it is because I do not want you to share my burden, Mildred. Your sorrow may be cured, perhaps—mine never can be. Time may be merciful to you—for me time can do nothing."

"Dearest, what hope can there be for me that you do not share?—the Christian's hope of meeting our loved one hereafter. I have no other hope."

"I hardly know if I have that hope," he answered slowly, with deepest despondency.

"And yet you are a Christian."

"If to endeavour to follow Christ, the Teacher and Friend of humanity, is to be a Christian—yes."

"And you believe in the world to come?"

"I try so to believe, Mildred. I try. Faith in the Kingdom of Heaven does not come easily to a man whose life has been ruled by the inexorable Fates. Not a word, darling; let us not talk of these things. We know no more than Socrates knew in his dungeon; no more than Roger Bacon knew in his old age—unheard, buried, forgotten. Never doubt my love, dearest. That is changeless. You and Lola were the sunshine of my life. You shall be my sunshine henceforward. I have been selfish in brooding over my sorrow; but it is the habit of my mind to grieve in silence. Forgive me, dear wife; forgive me."

He clasped her in his arms, and again she felt assured of her husband's affection; but she knew all the same that there was some sorrow in his past life which he had kept hidden from her, which he meant her never to know.

Many a time in their happy married life she had tried to lead him to talk of his boyhood and youth. About his days at Eton and Oxford he was frank enough, but he was curiously reticent about his home life and about those years which he had spent

travelling over the Continent after he had left his father's house for good.

"I was not happy at home, Mildred," he told her one day. "My father and I did not get on together, as the phrase goes. He was very fond of my elder brother. They had the same way of thinking about most things. Randolph's marriage pleased my father, and he looked to Randolph to strengthen the position of our family, which had been considerably reduced by his own extravagance. He would have liked my mother's estate to have gone to the elder son; but she had full disposing power, and she made me her heir. This set my father against me, and there came a time when, dearly as I loved my mother, I found that I could no longer live at home. I went out into the world, a lonely man; and I only came back to the old home after my father's death."

This was the fullest account of his family history that George Greswold had given his wife. From his reserve in speaking of his father she divined that the balance of wrong had been upon the side of the parent rather than of the son. Had a man of her

husband's temper been the sinner he would have frankly confessed his errors. Of his mother he spoke with undeviating love; and he seemed to have been on friendly terms with his brother.

On the morning after that tearful talk in the twilight Mr. Greswold startled his wife from a pensive reverie as they sat at breakfast in the garden. They always breakfasted out of doors on fine summer mornings. They had made no change in old customs since their return, as some mourners might have done, hoping to blunt the keen edge of memory by an alteration in the details of life. Both knew too well how futile any such alteration of their surroundings would be. They remembered Lola no more vividly at Enderby than they had remembered her in Switzerland.

"My dearest, I have been thinking of you incessantly since last night, and of the loneliness of your life," George Greswold began seriously, as he sat in a low basket-chair, sipping his coffee, with his favourite setter Kassandra at his feet; an Irish dog that had been famous for feather in days gone by, but who had insinuated herself into the family affec-

tions, and had got herself accepted as a household companion to the ruin of her sporting qualities. Kassandra went no more with the guns. Her place was the drawing-room or the lawn.

"I can never be lonely, George, while I have you. There is no other company I can ever care about henceforward."

"Let me always be the first, dear; but you should have female companionship of some kind. Our house is empty and voiceless. There should be some young voice—some young footstep—"

"Do you mean that I ought to hire a girl to run up and down stairs, and laugh in the corridors, as Lola used? O, George, how can you!" exclaimed Mildred, beginning to cry.

"No, no, dear. I had no such thought in my mind. I was thinking of Randolph's daughter. You seemed to like her when she and her sister were here two years ago."

"Yes, she was a nice, bright girl then, and my darling was pleased with her. How merry they were together, playing battledore and shuttlecock over there by the yew hedge! Don't ask me ever

to see that girl again, George. It would make my heart ache."

"I am sorry to hear you say that, Mildred. I was going to ask you to have her here on a good long visit. Now that Rosalind is married, Pamela has no home of her own. Rosalind and her husband like having her occasionally—for a month or six weeks at a time; but Sir Henry Mountford's house is not Pamela's home. She would soon begin to feel herself an incubus. The Mountfords are very fond of society, and just a little worldly. They would soon be tired of a girl whose presence was no direct advantage. I have been thinking that with us Pamela would never be in the way. You need not see too much of her in this big house. There would be plenty of room for her to carry on her own pursuits and amusements without boring you; and when you wanted her she would be at hand, a bright companionable girl, who would grow fonder of you every day."

"I could not endure her fondness. I could not endure any girl's companionship. Her presence would only remind me of my loss."

"Dearest, I thought we were both agreed that, as nothing can make us forget our darling, it cannot matter to us how often we are reminded of her."

"Yes, by silent, unreasoning things like Kassandra," touching the dog's tawny head with a caressing hand; "or the garden—the trees and flowers she loved—her books—her piano. Those things may remind us of our darling without hurting us. But to hear a girl's voice calling me—as she used to call me from the garden on summer mornings—to hear a girl's laughter—"

"Yes, it would be painful, love, at first. I can understand that, Mildred. But if you can benefit an orphan girl by having her here, I know your kind heart will not refuse. Let her come for a few weeks, and if her presence pains you she shall stay no longer. She shall not be invited again. I would not ask you to receive a stranger, but my brother's daughter is near me in blood."

"Let her come, George," said Mildred impulsively; "I am very selfish—thinking only of my own feelings. Let her come. How strangely this

talk of ours reminds me of something that happened when I was a child!"

"What was that, Mildred?"

"You have heard me speak of Fay, my playfellow?"

"Yes."

"I remember the evening my father asked mamma to let her come to us. It seemed just now as if you were using his very words; and yet all things were different."

Mildred had told him very little about that childish sorrow of hers. She had shrunk from any allusion to the girl whose existence bore witness against her father. She, too, fond and frank as she was, had kept her own counsel, had borne the burden of a secret.

"Yes, I have heard you speak of the girl you called Fay, and of whom you must have been very fond, for the tears came into your eyes when you mentioned her. Did she live with you long?"

"O, no, a very short time! She was sent to school—to a finishing-school at Brussels."

"Brussels!" he repeated, with a look of surprise.

"Yes. Do you know anything about Brussels schools?"

"Nothing personally. I have heard of girls educated there. And what became of your playfellow after the Brussels school?"

"I never heard."

"And you never tried to find out?"

"Yes, I asked my mother; but there was a prejudice in her mind against poor Fay. I would rather not talk about her, George."

Her vivid blush, her evident confusion, perplexed her husband. There was some kind of mystery, it seemed—some family trouble in the background, or Mildred, who was all candour, would have spoken more freely.

"Then may I really invite Pamela?" he asked, after a brief silence, during which he had responded to the endearments of Kassandra, too well fed to have any design upon the dainties on the breakfast-table, and only asking to be loved.

"I will write to her myself, George. Where is she?"

"Not very far off. She is at Cowes with the

Mountfords, on board Sir Henry's yacht the Gadfly. You had better send your letter to the post-office, marked Gadfly."

The invitation was despatched by the first post; Miss Greswold was asked to come to the Manor as soon as she liked, and to stay till the autumn.

The next day was Sunday, and Mr. and Mrs. Greswold went to church together by the path that led them within a few paces of Lola's grave.

For the first time since her daughter's death Mildred had put on a light gown. Till to-day she had worn only black. This morning she came into the vivid sunlight in a pale gray gown of soft lustreless silk, and a neat little gray straw bonnet, which set off the fairness of her skin and the sheen of her golden hair. The simple fashion of her gown became her tall, slim figure, which had lost none of the grace of girlhood. She was the prettiest and most distinguished-looking woman in Enderby Church, although there were more county families represented there upon that particular Sunday than are often to be seen in a village church.

The Manor House pew was on one side of the

chancel, and commanded a full view of the nave. The first lesson was long, and while it was being read Mildred's eyes wandered idly along the faces in the nave, recognising countenances that had been familiar to her ever since her marriage, until that wandering gaze stopped suddenly, arrested by a face that was strange.

She saw this strange face between other faces—as it were in a cleft in the block of people. She saw it at the end of a vista, with the sunlight from the chancel window full upon it—a face that impressed her as no face of a stranger had ever done before.

It looked like the face of Judas, she thought; and then in the next moment was ashamed of her fancy.

"It is only the colouring, and the effect of the light upon it," she told herself. "I am not so weak as to cherish the vulgar prejudice against that coloured hair."

"That coloured hair" was of the colour which a man's enemies call red and his friends auburn or chestnut. It was of that ruddy brown which Titian

has immortalised in more than one Venus, and without which Potiphar's wife would be a nonentity.

The stranger wore a small pointed beard of this famous colouring. His eyes were of a reddish brown, large, and luminous, his eyebrows strongly arched; his nose was a small aquiline; his brow was wide and lofty, slightly bald in front. His mouth was the only obviously objectionable feature. The lips were finely moulded, from a Greek sculptor's standpoint, and would have done for a Greek Bacchus, but the expression was at once crafty and sensual. The auburn moustache served to accentuate rather than to conceal that repellant expression. Mildred looked at him presently as he stood up for the *Te Deum*.

He was tall, for she saw his head well above intervening heads. He looked about five-and-thirty. He had the air of being a gentleman.

"Whoever he is, I hope I shall never see him again," thought Mildred.

CHAPTER X.

THERE IS ALWAYS THE SKELETON.

When Mr. and Mrs. Greswold left the church, the stranger was taking his place in the Hillersdon wagonette, a capacious vehicle, drawn by a pair of upstanding black-brown horses, set off by servants in smart liveries of dark brown and gold.

Mildred gave a sigh of relief. If the stranger was a visitor at Riverdale it was not likely that he would stay long in the neighbourhood, or be seen again for years to come. The guests at Riverdale were generally birds of passage; and the same faces seldom appeared there twice. Mr. and Mrs. Hillersdon of Riverdale were famous for their extensive circle, and famous for bringing new people into the county. Some of their neighbours said it was Mr. Hillersdon who brought the people there, and that Mrs. Hillersdon had nothing to do with the visiting list; others declared that husband and wife were equally fickle and equally frivolous.

Riverdale was one of the finest houses within ten miles of Romsey, and it was variously described by the local gentry. It was called a delightful house, or it was called a curious house, according to the temper of the speaker. Its worst enemy could not deny that it was a splendid house — spacious, architectural, luxurious, with all the appendages of wealth and dignity—nor could its worst enemy deny its merit as one of the most hospitable houses in the county.

Notwithstanding this splendour and lavish hospitality, the local magnates did not go to Riverdale, and the Hillersdons were not received in some of the best houses. Tom Hillersdon was a large landowner, a millionaire, and a man of good family; but Tom Hillersdon was considered to have stranded himself in middle life by a marriage which in the outer world was spoken of vaguely as "unfortunate," but which the straitlaced among his neighbours considered fatal. No man who had so married could hold up his head among his friends any more; no man who had so married could hope to have his wife received in decent people's houses. In spite of

which opinion prevailing among Tom Hillersdon's oldest friends Mrs. Hillersdon contrived to gather a good many people round her, and some of them the most distinguished in the land. She had Cabinet Ministers, men of letters, and famous painters among her guests. She had plenty of women friends—of a sort: attractive women, intellectual and enlightened women; sober matrons, bread-and-butter girls; women who doated on Mrs. Hillersdon, and, strange to say, had never heard her history.

And yet Hillersdon's wife had a history scarcely less famous than that of Cleopatra or Nell Gwynne. Louise Hillersdon was once Louise Lorraine, the young adventuress whose Irish gray eyes had set all London talking when the Great Exhibition of '62 was still a monstrous iron skeleton, and when South Kensington was in its infancy. Louise Lorraine's extravagance, and Louise Lorraine's devotees, from German princes and English dukes downwards, had been town-talk. Her box at the opera had been the cynosure of every eye; and Paris ran mad when she drove in

the Bois, or exhibited her diamonds in the Rue Lepelletier; or supped in the small hours at the Café de Paris, with the topmost strawberries in the basket. Numerous and conflicting were the versions of her early history—the more sensational chronicles describing her as the Aphrodite of the gutter. Some people declared that she could neither read nor write, and could not stir without her amanuensis at her elbow; others affirmed that she spoke four languages, and read a Greek play or a chapter of Thucidydes every night, with her feet on the fender, while her maid brushed her hair. The sober truth lay midway between these extremes. She was the daughter of a doctor in a line regiment; she was eminently beautiful, very ignorant, and very clever. She wrote an uneducated hand, never read anything better than a sentimental novel, sang prettily, and could accompany her songs on the guitar with a good deal of dash and fire. To this may be added that she was an adept in the art of dress, had as much tact and finesse as a leader of the old French noblesse, and more audacity than a Parisian cocotte in the golden age of Cocotterie.

Such she was when Tom Hillersdon, Wiltshire squire, and millionaire, swooped like an eagle upon this fair dove, and bore her off to his eerie. There was howling and gnashing of teeth among those many admirers who were all thinking seriously about making the lovely Louise a *bonâ fide* offer; and it was felt in a certain set that Tom Hillersdon had done a valiant and victorious deed; but his country friends were of one accord in the idea that Hillersdon had wrecked himself for ever.

The Squire's wife came to Riverdale, and established herself there with as easy an air as if she had been a duchess. She gave herself no trouble about the county families. London was near enough for the fair Louise, and she filled her house—or Tom Hillersdon filled it—with relays of visitors from the great city. Scarcely had she been settled there a week when the local gentry were startled at seeing her sail into church with one of the most famous English statesmen in her train. Upon the Sunday after she was attended by a great painter and a well-known savant; and besides these she had a pew full of smaller fry—a lady novelist, a

fashionable actor, a celebrated Queen's Counsel, and a county member.

"Where does she get those men?" asked Lady Marjorie Danefeld, the Conservative member's wife; "surely they can't *all* be—reminiscences."

It had been supposed while the newly-wedded couple were on their honeymoon that the lady's arrival at Riverdale would inaugurate a reign of profanity—that Sunday would be given over to Bohemian society, café-chantant songs, champagne, and cigarette-smoking. Great was the surprise of the locality, therefore, when Mrs. Hillersdon appeared in the Squire's pew on Sunday morning, neatly dressed, demure, nay, with an aspect of more than usual sanctity; greater still the astonishment when she reappeared in the afternoon, and listened meekly to the catechising of the school-children and to the baptism of a refractory baby; greater even yet when it was found that these pious practices were continued, that she never missed a Saint's-Day service, that she had morning prayers for family and household, and that she held meetings of an evangelical character in her drawing-room—meetings at

which curates from outlying parishes gathered like a flock of crows, and at which the excellence of the tea and coffee, pound-cake and muffins, speedily became known to the outside world.

Happily for Tom Hillersdon these pious tendencies did not interfere with his amusements or the pleasantness of his domestic life. Riverdale was enlivened by a perennial supply of lively or interesting people. Notoriety of some kind was a passport to the Hillersdons' favour. It was an indication that a man was beginning to make his mark when he was asked to Riverdale. When he had made his mark he might think twice about going. Riverdale was the paradise of budding celebrities.

So to-day, seeing the stranger get into the Hillersdon wagonette, Mrs. Greswold opined that he was a man who had made some kind of reputation. He could not be an actor with that beard. He was a painter, perhaps. She thought he looked like a painter.

The wagonette was full of well-dressed women and well-bred men, all with an essentially metropolitan—or cosmopolitan—air. The eighteen-carat

stamp of "county" was obviously deficient. Mrs. Hillersdon had her own carriage—a barouche—which she shared with an elderly lady, who looked as correct as if she had been a bishop's wife. She was on bowing terms with Mrs. Greswold. They had met at hunt-balls and charity bazaars, and at various other functions from which the wife of a local landowner can hardly be excluded—even when she has a history.

Mildred thought no more of the auburn-haired stranger after the wagonette had disappeared in a cloud of summer-dust. She strolled slowly home with her husband by a walk which they had been in the habit of taking on fine Sundays after morning service, but which they had never trodden together since Lola's death. It was a round which skirted the common, and took them past a good many of the cottages, and their tenants had been wont to loiter at their gates on fine Sundays, in the hope of getting a passing word with the Squire and his wife. There had been something patriarchal, or clannish, in the feeling between landlord and tenant, labourer and master, which can only prevail in a parish where

the chief landowner spends the greater part of his life at home.

To-day every one was just as respectful as of old; curtsies were as low and tones as reverential; but George Greswold and his wife felt there was a difference, all the same. A gulf had been cleft between them and their people by last summer's calamity. It was not the kindred of the dead in whom this coolness was distinguishable. The bereaved seemed drawn nearer to their Squire by an affliction which had touched him too. But in Enderby parish there was a bond of kindred which seemed to interlink the whole population. There were not above three family names in the village, and everybody was everybody else's cousin, when not a nearer relative. Thus, in dismissing his bailiff and dairy people, Mr. Greswold had given umbrage to almost all his cottagers. He was no longer regarded as a kind master. A man who could dismiss a servant after twenty years' faithful service was, in the estimation of Enderby parish, a ruthless tyrant—a master whose yoke galled every shoulder.

"Him seemed to be so fond of we all," said

Luke Thomas, the village wheelwright, brother of that John Thomas who had been Mr. Greswold's bailiff, and who was now dreeing his weird in Canada; "and yet offend he, and him can turn and sack yer as if yer was a thief—sweep yer off his premises like a handful o' rubbish. Faithful service don't count with he."

George Greswold felt the change from friendly gladness to cold civility. He could see the altered expression in all those familiar faces. The only sign of affection was from Mrs. Rainbow, standing at her cottage gate in decent black, with sunken cheeks worn pale by many tears. She burst out crying at sight of Mildred Greswold, and clasped her hand in a fervour of sympathy.

"O, to think of your sweet young lady, ma'am! that you should lose her, as I lost my Polly!" she sobbed; and the two women wept together—sisters in affliction.

"You don't think we are to blame, do you, Mrs. Rainbow?" Mildred said gently.

"No, no, indeed, ma'am. We all know it was God's will. We must kiss the rod."

"What fatalists these people are!" said Greswold, as he and his wife walked homeward by the sweet-smelling common, where the heather showed purple here and there, and where the harebells were beginning to dance upon the wind. "Yes, it is God's will; but the name of that God is Nemesis."

Husband and wife were almost silent during luncheon. Both were depressed by that want of friendliness in those who had been to them as familiar friends. To have forfeited confidence and affection was hard when they had done so much to merit both. Mildred could but remember how she and her golden-haired daughter had gone about amongst those people, caring for all their needs, spiritual and temporal, never approaching them from the standpoint of superiority, but treating them verily as friends. She recalled long autumn afternoons in the village reading-room, when she and Lola had presided over a bevy of matrons and elderly spinsters, she reading aloud to them while they worked, Lola threading needles to save elderly eyes, sewing on buttons, indefatigable in giving help of all kinds to those village sempstresses. She had fancied that

those mothers' meetings, the story-books, and the talk had brought them all into a bond of affectionate sympathy; and yet one act of stern justice seemed to have cancelled all obligations.

Mr. Greswold lighted a cigar after lunch, and went for a ramble in those extensive copses which were one of the charms of Enderby Manor, miles and miles of woodland walks, dark and cool in the hottest day of summer—lonely footpaths where the master of Enderby could think his own thoughts without risk of coming face to face with any one in that leafy solitude. The Enderby copses were cherished rather for pleasure than for profit, and were allowed to grow a good deal higher and a good deal wilder and thicker than the young wood upon neighbouring estates.

Mildred went to the drawing-room and to her piano, after her husband her chief companion and confidante now that Lola was gone. Music was her passion—the only art that moved her deeply, and to sit alone wandering from number to number of Beethoven and Mozart, Bach or Mendelssohn, was the very luxury of loneliness.

Adhering in all things to the rule that Sunday was not as other days, she had her library of sacred music apart from other volumes, and it was sacred music only which she played on Sundays. Her *répertoire* was large, and she roamed at will among the classic masters of the last two hundred years, but for sacred music Bach and Mozart were her favourites.

She was playing a Gloria by the latter composer when she heard a carriage drive past the windows, and looked up just in time to catch a glimpse of a profile that startled her with a sudden sense of strangeness and familiarity. The carriage was a light T-cart, driven by a groom in the Hillersdon livery.

A visitor from Riverdale was a novelty, for, although George Greswold and Tom Hillersdon were friendly in the hunting-field, Riverdale and the Manor were not on visiting terms. The visit was for her husband, Mildred concluded, and she went on playing.

The door was opened by the new footman, who announced " Mr. Castellani."

Mrs. Greswold rose from the piano to find herself face to face with the man whose countenance, seen in the distance, in the light of the east window, had reminded her of Judas. Seen as she saw him now, in the softer light of the afternoon, standing before her with a deprecating air in her own drawing-room, the stranger looked altogether different, and she thought he had a pleasing expression.

He was tall and slim, well dressed in a subdued metropolitan style; and he had an air of distinction and elegance which would have marked him anywhere as a creature apart from the common herd. It was not an English manner. There was a supple grace in his movements which suggested a Southern origin. There was a pleading look in the full brown eyes which suggested an emotional temperament.

"An Italian, no doubt," thought Mildred, taking this Southern gracefulness in conjunction with the Southern name.

She wondered on what pretence this stranger had called, and what could be his motive for coming.

"Mrs. Greswold, I have to apologise humbly for presenting myself without having first sent you my credentials and waited for your permission to call," he said, in very perfect English, with only the slightest Milanese accent; and then he handed Mrs. Greswold an unsealed letter, which he had taken from his breast-pocket.

She glanced at it hastily, not a little embarrassed by the situation. The letter was from an intimate friend, an amateur *littérateur*, who wrote graceful sonnets and gave pleasant parties:

"I need not excuse myself, my dear friend, for making Mr. Castellani known to you in the flesh, as I have no doubt he is already familiar to you in the spirit. He is the anonymous author of *Nepenthe*, the book that *almost every one* has been reading and *quite every one* has been talking about this season. Only the few can *understand* it; but you are of those few, and I feel assured your *deepest* feelings have been stirred by that *most exceptional* work. How delicious it must be with you among green

lanes and English meadows! We are just rushing off to a land of extinct volcanoes for my poor husband's annual cure. *A vous de cœur,* DIANA TOMKISON."

"Pray sit down," said Mildred, as she finished her gushing friend's note; "my husband will be in presently—I hope in time to see you."

"Pardon me if, in all humility, I say it is *you* I was especially anxious to see, to know, if it were possible—delightful as it will be also to know Mr. Greswold. It is with your name that my past associations are interwoven."

"Indeed! How is that?"

"It is a long story, Mrs. Greswold. To explain the association I must refer to the remote past. My grandfather was in the silk trade, like your grandfather."

Mildred blushed; the assertion came upon her like an unpleasant surprise. It was a shock. That great house of silk merchants from which her father's wealth had been derived had hardly ever been mentioned in her presence. Lord Castle-Connell's daughter had never grown out of the idea that all

trade is odious, and *her* daughter had almost forgotten that her father had ever been in trade.

"Yes, when the house of Fausset was in its infancy the house of Felix & Sons, silk manufacturers and silk merchants, was one of the largest on the hillside of old Lyons. My great-grandfather was one of the richest men in Lyons, and he was able to help the clever young Englishman, your grandfather, who came into his house as corresponding clerk, to perfect himself in the French language, and to find out what the silk trade was like. He had a small capital, and when he had learnt something about the trade, he established himself near St. Paul's Churchyard as a wholesale trader in a very small way. He had no looms of his own in those days; and it was the great house of Felix, and the credit given him by that house, which enabled him to hold his own, and to make a fortune. When your father began life the house of Felix was on the wane. Your grandfather had established a manufactory of his own at Lyons. Felix & Sons had grown old-fashioned. They had forgotten to march with the times. They had allowed them-

selves to go to sleep; and they were on the verge of bankruptcy when your father came to their rescue with a loan which enabled them to tide over their difficulties. They had had a lesson, and they profited by it. The house of Felix recovered its ascendency, and the loan was repaid before your father retired from business."

"I am not surprised to hear that my father was generous. I should have been slow to believe that he could have been ungrateful," said Mildred softly.

"Your name is among my earliest recollections," pursued Castellani. "My mother was educated at a convent at Roehampton, and she was very fond of England and English people. The first journey I can distinctly remember was a journey to London, which occurred when I was ten years old. I remember my father and mother talking about Mr. Fausset. She had known him when she was a little girl. He used to stay in her father's house when he came to Lyons on business. She would like to have seen him and his wife and daughter, for old times' sake; but she had been told that his wife was a lady of rank, and that he had broken off all asso-

ciations with his trading career. She was too diffident to intrude herself upon her father's old ally. One day our carriage passed yours in the Park. Yes, I saw you, a golden-haired child—yes, madam, saw you with these eyes—and the vision has stayed with me, a sunny remembrance of my own childhood. I can see that fair child's face in this room to-day."

"You should have seen my daughter," faltered Mildred sadly.

"You have a daughter?" said the stranger eagerly.

"I *had* a daughter. She is gone. I only put off my black gown yesterday; but my heart and mind will wear mourning for her till I go to my grave."

"Ah, madam, how deeply I sympathise with such a grief!" murmured Castellani.

He had a voice of peculiar depth and beauty—one of those rare voices whose every tone is music. The pathos and compassion in those few commonplace words moved Mildred to sudden tears. She commanded herself with an effort.

"I am much interested in your reminiscences," she said, after a brief pause. "My father was very dear to me. My mother came of an old Irish family, and the Irish, as you know, are apt to be over-proud of high birth. I had never heard my father's commercial life spoken about until to-day. I only knew him as an idle man, without business cares of any kind, able to take life pleasantly. He used to spend two or three months of every year under this roof. It was a terrible blow to me when we lost him six years ago, and I think my husband mourned him almost as deeply as I did. But tell me about your book. Are you really the author of *Nepenthe*, that nameless author who has been so much discussed?"

"And who has been identified with so many distinguished people — Mr. Gladstone — Cardinal Newman."

"Mr. Swinburne—Mr. Browning. I have heard all kinds of speculations. And is it really you?"

"Yes, it is I. To you I may plead guilty, since, unfortunately, the authorship of *Nepenthe* is now *le secret de Polichinelle.*"

"It is a—strange book," said Mildred. "My husband and I were both interested in it, and impressed by it. But your book saddened us both. You seem to believe in nothing."

"'Seems,' madam! nay, I know not 'seems;' but perhaps I am not so bad as you think me. I am of Hamlet's temper—inquiring rather than disbelieving. To live is to doubt. And I own that I have seen enough of this life to discover that the richest gift Fate can give to man is the gift of forgetfulness."

"I cannot think that. I would not forget, even if I could. It would be treason to forget the beloved ones we have lost."

"Ah, Mrs. Greswold, most men have worse memories than the memory of the dead. The wounds we want healed are deeper than those made by Death; his scars we can afford to look upon. There are wounds that have gone deeper, and that leave an uglier mark."

There was a pause. Mr. Castellani made no sign of departure. He evidently intended to wait for the Squire's return. Through the open windows

of a second drawing-room, divided from the first by an archway, they could see the servants setting out the tea-table on the lawn. A Turkey carpet was spread under the cedar, and there were basket-chairs of various shapes, cushioned, luxurious, and two or three small wicker-tables of different colours, and a milking-stool or two, and all the indications of outdoor life. The one thing missing was that aerial figure, robed in white, which had been wont to flit about among the dancing shadows of branch and blossom—a creature as evanescent as they, it seemed to that mourning mother who remembered her to-day.

"Are you staying long at Riverdale?" asked Mildred presently, by way of conversation.

"If Mrs. Hillersdon would be good enough to have me, I would stay another fortnight. The place is perfect, the surrounding scenery has your true English charm, and my hostess is simply delightful."

"You like her?" asked Mildred, interested.

No woman can help being curious about a woman with such a history as Mrs. Hillersdon's. All the

elements of romance and mystery seem, from the feminine standpoint, to concentre in such a career. How many hearts has such a woman broken; how many lives has she ruined; how often has she been on the brink of madness or suicide?—she, the placid matron, with her fat carriage-horses, and powdered footmen, and big prayer-book, and demure behaviour, and altogether bourgeois surroundings.

"Like her? Yes; she is such a clever woman."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, she is a marvel—the cleverest woman I know."

He laid a stress on the superlative. His praise might mean anything—might be a hidden sneer. He might praise as the devil prays—backwards. Mildred had an uncomfortable feeling that he was not in earnest.

"Have you known her long?" she asked.

"Not very long; only this season. I am told that she is fickle, or that other people are fickle, and that she seldom knows any one more than a season. But I do not mean to be fickle; I mean to be a house-friend at Riverdale all my life if she will let

me. She is a very clever woman, and thoroughly artistic."

Mildred had not quite grasped the modern significance of this last word.

"Does Mrs. Hillersdon paint?" she asked.

"No, she does not paint."

"She plays—or sings, I suppose?"

"No. I am told she once sang Spanish ballads with a guitar accompaniment; but the people who remember her singing tell me that her arms were the chief feature in the performance. Her arms are lovely to this day. No; she neither paints, nor plays, nor sings; but she is supremely artistic. She dresses as few women of five-and-forty know how to dress—dresses so as to make one think five-and-forty the most perfect age for a woman; and she has a marvellous appreciation of art, of painting, of poetry, of acting, of music. She is almost the only woman to whom I have ever played Beethoven who has seemed to me thoroughly *simpatica*."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mildred, surprised, "you yourself play, then?"

"It is hardly a merit in me," answered Castel-

lani modestly; "my father was one of the finest musicians of his time in Italy."

"Indeed!"

"You are naturally surprised. His genius was poorly appreciated. His name was hardly known out of Milan and Brussels. Strange to say, those stolid Flemings appreciated him. His work was over the heads of the vulgar public. He saw such men as Verdi and Gounod triumphant, while he remained obscure."

"But surely you admire Verdi and Gounod?"

"In their places, yes; both are admirable; but my father's place should have been in a higher rank of composers. But let me not plague you about him. He is dead, and forgotten. He died crownless. I heard you playing Mozart's 'Gloria' as I came in. You like Mozart?"

"I adore him."

"Yes, I know there are still people who like his music. Chopin did; asked for it on his death-bed," said Castellani, with a wry face, as if he were talking of a vulgar propensity for sauerkraut or a morbid hankering for asafœtida.

"How I wish you would play something while we are waiting for my husband!" said Mildred, seeing her visitor's gaze wandering to the open piano.

"If you will go into the garden and take your tea, I will play with delight while you take it. I doubt if I could play to you in cold blood. I know you are critical."

"And you think I am not *simpatica*," retorted Mildred, laughing at him. She was quite at her ease with him already, all thought of that Judas face in the church being forgotten. His half-deferential, half-caressing manner; his easy confidences about himself and his own tastes, had made her more familiar with his individuality in the space of an hour than she would have been with the average Englishman in a month. She did not know whether she liked or disliked him; but he amused her, and it was a new sensation for her to feel amused.

She sauntered softly out to the lawn, and he began to play.

Heavens, what a touch! Was it really *her* piano which answered with tones so exquisite—which gave forth such thrilling melody? He played an impro-

vised arrangement of Schubert's "Ave Maria," and she stood entranced till the last dying *arpeggio* melted into silence. No one could doubt that he came of a race gifted in music.

"Pray don't leave the piano," she said softly, from her place by the open window.

"I will play till you call me away," he answered, as he began Chopin's Etude in C sharp minor.

That weird and impassioned composition reached its close just as George Greswold approached from a little gate on the other side of the lawn. Mildred went to meet him, and Castellani left the piano and came out of the window to be presented to his host.

Nothing could be more strongly marked than the contrast between the two men, as they stood facing each other in the golden light of afternoon. Greswold, tall, broad-shouldered, rugged-looking, in his rough brown heather suit and deerstalker cap, carrying a thick stick, with an iron fork at the end of it, for the annihilation of chance weeds in his peregrinations. His fine and massive features had a worn look, his cheeks were hollow, his dark hair

and beard were grizzled here and there, his dark complexion had lost the hue of youth. He looked ten years older than his actual age.

Before him stood the Italian, graceful, gracious in every line and every movement; his features delicately chiselled, his eyes dark, full, and bright; his complexion of that milky pallor which is so often seen with hair tending towards red; his brown beard of silkiest texture; his hands delicately modelled and of ivory whiteness; his dress imbued with all the grace which a fashionable tailor can give to the clothes of a man who cultivates the beautiful, even in the barren field of nineteenth century costume. It was impossible that so marked a contrast could escape Mildred's observation altogether; yet she perceived it dimly. The picture came back to her memory afterwards in more vivid colours.

She made the necessary introduction, and then proceeded to pour out the tea, leaving the two men to talk to each other.

"Your name has an Italian sound," Greswold said presently.

"It is a Milanese name. My father was a native of Milan; my mother was French, but she was educated in England, and all her proclivities were English. It was at her desire my father sent me to Rugby, and afterwards to Cambridge. Her fatal illness called me back to Italy immediately after I had got my degree, and it was some years before I again visited England."

"Were you in Italy all that time?" asked Greswold, looking down absently, and with an unwonted trouble in his face.

Mildred sat at the tea-table, the visitor waiting upon her, insisting upon charging himself with her husband's cup as well as his own; an attention and reversal of etiquette of which Mr. Greswold seemed unconscious. Kassandra had returned with her master from a long walk, and was lying at his feet in elderly exhaustion. She saluted the stranger with a suppressed growl when he approached with the teacups. Kassandra adored her own people, but was not remarkable for civility to strangers.

"Yes; I wasted four or five years in the South —in Florence, in Venice, or along the Riviera, wan-

dering about like Satan, not having made up my mind what to do in the world."

Greswold was silent, bending down to play with Kassandra, who wagged her tail with a gentle largo movement, in grateful contentment.

"You must have heard my father's name when you were at Milan," said Castellani. "His music was fashionable *there*."

Mildred looked up with a surprised expression. She had never heard her husband talk of Milan, and yet this stranger mentioned his residence there as if it were an established fact.

"How did you know I was ever at Milan?" asked Greswold, looking up sharply.

"For the simplest of reasons. I had the honour of meeting you on more than one occasion at large assemblies, where my insignificant personality would hardly impress itself upon your memory. And I met you a year later at Lady Lochinvar's palace at Nice, soon after your first marriage."

Mildred looked up at her husband. He was pale as ashes, his lips whitening as she gazed at him. She felt her own cheeks paling; felt a sudden coldness

creeping over her, as if she were going to faint. She watched her husband dumbly, expecting him to tell this man that he was mistaken, that he was confounding him, George Greswold, with some one else; but Greswold sat silent, and presently, as if to hide his confusion, bent again over the dog, who got up suddenly and licked his face in a gush of affection—as if she knew—as if she knew.

He had been married before, and he had told his wife not one word of that first marriage. There had been no hint of the fact that he was a widower when he asked John Fausset for his daughter's hand.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BEGINNING OF DOUBT.

ENDERBY Church clock struck six. They heard every chime, slow and clear in the summer stillness, as they sat in the broad shadow of the cedar, silent all three.

It seemed as if the striking of the clock were the breaking of a spell.

"So late?" exclaimed Castellani, in a cheery voice; "and I promised Mrs. Hillersdon to be back in time to drive to Romsey for the evening service. The old Abbey Church of Romsey, she tells me, is a thing to dream about. There is no eight-o'clock dinner at Riverdale on Sundays. Every one goes to church somewhere, and we sup at half-past nine, and after supper there is sometimes extempore prayer—and sometimes there are charades or dumb crambo. *C'est selon.* When the Prince was there they had dumb crambo. Good-bye. I am almost ashamed

to ask if I may ever come again, after having bored you for such an unconscionable time."

He had the easiest air possible, and seemed totally unconscious of any embarrassment caused by his allusions to the past; and yet in both faces, as he looked from one to the other, he must have seen the strongest indications of trouble.

Mrs. Greswold murmured something to the effect that she would be glad to see him at any time, a speech obviously conventional and unmeaning. Mr. Greswold rose hastily and accompanied him to the hall-door, where the cart still waited for him, the groom fixed as a statue of despondency.

Mr. Castellani was inclined to be loquacious to the last. Greswold was brief almost to incivility. He stood watching the light cart roll away, and then went slowly back to the garden and to his seat under the cedar.

He seated himself without a word, looking earnestly at his wife, whose drooping head and fixed attitude told of deepest thought. So they sat for some minutes in dead silence, Kassandra licking her

master's pendant hand, as he leaned forward with his elbow on his knee, infinitely sorry for him.

Mildred was the first to break that silence.

"George, why did you not tell me," she began in a low faltering voice, "that I was not your first wife? What reason could there be for concealment between you and me? I so trusted you; I so loved you. Nothing you could have told would have changed me."

"Dearest, there was one reason, and a powerful one," answered George Greswold firmly, meeting the appealing look of her eyes with a clear and steady gaze. "My first marriage is a sad remembrance for me—full of trouble. I did not care to tell you that miserable story, to call a dreaded ghost out of the grave of the past. My first marriage was the one great sorrow of my life, but it was only an episode in my life. It left me as lonely as it found me. There are very few who know anything about it. I am sorry that young man should have come here to trouble us with his uninvited reminiscences. For my own part, I cannot remember having ever seen his face before."

"I am sorry you should have kept such a secret from me," said Mildred. "It would have been so much wiser to have been candid. Do you think I should not have respected your sad memories? You had only to say to me 'Such things were; but let us not talk of them.' It would have been more manly; it would have been kinder to me."

"Say that I was a coward, if you like; that I am still a coward, where those memories are concerned," said Greswold.

The look of agony in his face melted her in a moment. She threw herself on her knees beside his chair, she and the dog fawning upon him together.

"Forgive me, forgive me, dearest," she pleaded, "I will never speak to you of this again. Women are so jealous—of the past most of all."

"Is that all?" he said: "God knows you have little need. Let us say no more, Mildred. The past is past: neither you nor I can alter it. Memory is inexorable. God Himself cannot change it."

"I will contrive that Mr. Castellani shall not come here again, George, if you object to see him."

"Pray don't trouble yourself. I would not have such a worm suppose that he could be obnoxious to me."

"Tell me what you think of him," she asked, in a lighter tone, anxious to bring back the easy mood of every-day life. "He seems very clever, and he is rather handsome."

"What do I think of the trumpet-ash on the verandah yonder? A beautiful parasite, which will hold on anywhere in the sunshine. Mr. Castellani is of the same family, I take it—studies his own interests first, and chooses his friends afterwards. He will do admirably for Riverdale."

"He plays divinely. His touch transformed my piano."

"He looks the kind of man who would play the piano," said Greswold, with ineffable contempt, looking down at his own sunburnt hands, hardened by exposure to all weathers, broadened by handling gun and punt-pole, and by half-a-dozen other forms of out-door exercise. "However, I have no objection to him, if he serve to amuse you and Pamela."

He spoke with a kind of weary indifference, as of

a man who cared for very little in life; and then he rose slowly, took up his stick, and strolled off to the shrubbery.

Pamela appeared on the following afternoon with boxes, bags, music-books, raquets, and parasols, in a proportion which gave promise of a long visit. She had asked as a tremendous favour to be allowed to bring Box—otherwise Fitz-Box—her fox-terrier, son of Sir Henry Mountford's Box, great-grandson of Brockenhurst Joe, through that distinguished animal's daughter Lyndhurst Jessie, and on the paternal side a lineal descendant of Mr. Murchison's Cracknel.

"I hope you won't mind very much," she wrote; "but it would be death to him if I were to leave him behind. To begin with, his brother Fitz-Cox, who has a villanous temper, would inevitably kill him; and besides that, he would pine to death at not sleeping in my room at night, which he has done ever since he was a puppy. If you will let me bring him, I will answer for his good manners, and that he shall not be a trouble to any one."

The descendant of Brockenhurst Joe rushed out into the garden, and made a lightning circuit of lawn and shrubberies, while his young mistress was kissing her Aunt Mildred, as she called her uncle's wife in the fulness of her affection.

"It is so very good of you to have me, and I am so delighted to come!" she said.

Mildred would have much preferred that she were anywhere else, yet could not help feeling kindly to her. She was a frank, bright-looking girl, with brown eyes, and almost flaxen hair; a piquant contrast, for the hair was genuine, and carried out in the eyebrows, which were only just a shade darker. Her complexion was fair to transparency, and she had just enough soft rosy bloom to light up the delicate skin. Her nose was slightly *retroussé*, her mouth was a little wider than she herself approved, and her teeth were perfection. She had a charming figure of the plump order, but its plumpness was a distress to her.

"Don't you think I get horribly stout?" she asked Mildred, when she was sitting at tea in the garden presently.

"You may be a little stouter than you were at sixteen, perhaps, but not at all too stout."

"O, but I am! I know it, I feel it. Don't endeavour to spare my feelings, aunt. It is useless. I know I am fat. Rosalind says I ought to marry; but I tell her it's absurd. How can anybody ever care for me now I am fat? They would only want my money if they asked me to marry them," concluded Pamela, clinging to the plural.

"My dear Pamela, do you wish me to tell you that you are charming, and all that you ought to be?" asked Mildred, laughing.

"O, no, no! I don't want you to spare my feelings. Everybody spares one's feelings. One grows up in ignorance of the horrors in one's appearance, because people *will* spare one's feelings. And then one sees oneself in a strange glass; or a boy in the street says something, and one knows the worst. I think I know the worst about myself. That is one comfort. How lovely it is here!" said Pamela, with a sudden change of mood, glancing at Mildred with a little pathetic look as she remembered the

childish figure that must be for ever missing from that home picture.

"I am so glad to be with you," she murmured softly, nestling up to Mildred's side, as they sat together on a rustic bench; "let me be useful to you, let me be a companion to you, if you can."

"You shall be both, dear."

"How good to say that! And you won't mind Box?"

"Not the least. If he will be amiable to Kassandra."

"He will. He has been brought up among other dogs. We are a very doggy family at the Hall. Would you think he was worth a hundred and fifty guineas?" asked Pamela with ill-concealed pride, as the scion of illustrious progenitors came up and put his long lean head in her hand, and conversed with her in a series of expressive snorts, as it were a conversational code.

"I hardly know what constitutes perfection in a fox-terrier."

"No more do I; but I know he is perfect. He is said to be the image of Cracknel, only better. I

tremble when I think that my possession of him hangs by a thread. He might be stolen at any moment."

"You must be careful."

"Yes, I cannot be too careful. Here comes Uncle George," said Pamela, rising and running to meet Mr. Greswold. "O, Uncle George, *how* altered you are!"

She was always saying the wrong thing, after the manner of impulsive girls; and she was quick-witted enough to discover her mistake the instant after.

Happily the dogs furnished a ready diversion. She introduced Box, and expatiated upon his grand qualities. She admired and made friends with Kassandra, and then settled down almost as lightly as a butterfly, in spite of her plumpness, on a Japanese stool, to take her teacup from Mildred's hands.

She was perfectly at her ease by this time, and told her uncle and aunt all about her sister Rosalind, and Rosalind's husband, Sir Henry Mountford, whom she summed up lightly as a nice old thing, and no end of fun. It was easy to divine from her

discourse that Rainham Hall was not an especially intellectual atmosphere, not a school of advanced thought, or of any other kind of thought. Pamela's talk was of tennis, yachting, fishing, and shooting, and of the people who shared in those sports. She seemed to belong to a world in which nobody ever sat down except to eat, or stayed indoors except under stress of weather.

"I hear you have all manner of clever people in your neighbourhood," she said by and by, having told all she had to tell about Rainham.

"Have we?" asked Greswold, smiling at her intensity.

"Yes, at Riverdale. They do say the author of *Nepenthe* is staying there, and that he is not a Roman Cardinal or an English statesman, but almost a young man—an Italian by birth—and *very* handsome. I would give worlds to see him."

"It is not unlikely you may be gratified without giving anything," answered her uncle. "Mr. Castellani was here yesterday afternoon, and threatened to repeat his visit."

"Castellani! Yes, that is the name I heard.

What a pretty name! And what is he like? Do tell me all about him, Aunt Mildred."

She turned to the woman as the more likely to give her a graphic description. The average man is an undescribing animal.

Mildred made an effort at self-command before she spoke. Castellani counted for but little in her recent trouble. His revelation had been an accident, and its effect entirely dissociated from him. Yet the very thought of the man troubled her, and the dread of seeing him again was like a physical pain.

"I do not know what to say about his appearance," she answered presently, slowly fanning herself with a great scarlet Japanese fan, pale and cool looking in her plain white gown with its black ribbons. The very picture of domestic peace, one would suppose, judging by externals only. "I suppose there are people who would think him handsome."

"Don't you, aunt?"

"No. I don't like the colour of his eyes or of his hair. They are of that reddish-brown which the

Venetian painters are so fond of, but which always gives me an idea of falsehood and treachery. Mr. Castellani is a very clever man, but he is not a man whom I could ever trust."

"How nice!" cried Pamela, her face radiant with enthusiasm; "a creature with red-brown hair, and eyes with a depth of falsehood in them. That is just the kind of man who might be the author of *Nepenthe*. If you had told me he was stout and rosy-cheeked, with pepper-and-salt whiskers and a fine, benevolent head, I would never have opened his book again."

"You seem to admire this *Nepenthe* prodigiously," said her uncle, looking at her with a calmly critical air. "Is it because the book is the fashion, or from your own unassisted appreciation of it? I did not think you were a bookish person."

"I'm not," cried Pamela. "I am a mass of ignorance. I don't know anything about science. I don't know the name of a single butterfly. I don't know one toadstool from another. But when I love a book it is a passion with me. My Keats has tumbled to pieces; my Shelley is disgracefully

dirty. I have read *Nepenthe* six times, and I am waiting for the cheap edition, to keep it under my pillow. It has made me an Agnostic."

"Do you know the dictionary meaning of that word?"

"I don't think I do; but I know I am an Agnostic. *Nepenthe* has unsettled all my old beliefs. If I had read it four years ago I should have refused to be confirmed. I am dying to know the author."

"You like unbelievers, then?" said Mr. Greswold.

"I adore men who dare to doubt, who are not afraid to stand apart from their fellow-men."

"On a bad eminence?"

"Yes, on a bad eminence. What a sweet expression! I can never understand Goethe's *Gretchen*."

"Why not?"

"How could she have cared for *Faust*, when she had the privilege of knowing *Mephistopheles*?"

Pamela Ransome had established herself in her pretty bedroom and dressing-room, and had supervised her maid while she unpacked and arranged all her belongings, before dinner-time. She came down

to the drawing-room, at a quarter to eight, as thoroughly at her ease as if she had lived half her life at Enderby Manor. She was a kind of visitor who gives no trouble, and who drops into the right place instinctively. Mildred Greswold felt cheered by her presence, in spite of that ever-recurrent pang of memory which associated all young bright things with the sweet girl-child who should have grown to womanhood under that roof, and who was lying a little way off, under the ripening berries of the mountain-ash, and in the deep shadow of a century-old yew.

They were very quiet in the drawing-room after dinner; Greswold reading in a nook apart, by the light of his own particular lamp; his wife bending over an embroidery-frame in her corner near the piano, where she had her own special dwarf bookcase and her work-basket, and the *bonheur du jour* at which she sometimes wrote letters, her own little table scattered with old family miniatures by Angelica Kaufmann, Cosway, and Ross, and antique watches in enamelled cases, and boxes of porcelain and gold and silver, every one of which had its history.

Every woman who lives much at home has some such corner, where the very atmosphere is full of home thoughts. She asked her niece to play, and to go on playing as long as she liked; and Pamela, pleased with the touch of the Broadwood grand, rang the changes upon Chopin, Schumann, Raff, and Brahm, choosing those compositions which least jarred upon the atmosphere of studious repose.

Mildred's needle moved slowly, as she sat in her low chair, with her hands in the lamp-light and her face in shadow, moved very slowly, and then stopped altogether, and the white hands lay idle in her lap, and the embroidery-frame, with its half-finished group of azaleas, slid from her knee to the ground. She was thinking—thinking of that one subject which had possessed her thoughts since yesterday afternoon; which had kept her awake through the brief darkness of the summer night and in the slow hours betwixt dawn and seven o'clock, when the entrance of the maid with the early cup of tea marked the beginning of the daily routine. In all those hours her thoughts had revolved round that one theme with an intolerable recurrence.

It was of her husband's first marriage she thought, and of his motive for silence about that marriage: that he who, in the whole course of their wedded lives, had been the very spirit of single-minded candour, should yet have suppressed this all-important event in his past history, was a fact in itself so startling and mysterious that it might well be the focus of a wife's troubled thoughts. He could not so have acted without some all-sufficient reason; and what manner of reason could that have been which had influenced him to conduct so entirely at variance with his own character?

What was there in the history of that marriage which had sealed his lips, which made it horrible to him to speak about it, even when fair dealing with the girl who was to be his wife should have constrained frankness?

Had he been cursed with a wicked wife; some beautiful creature, who had caught his heart in her toils, as a cat catches a bird, and had won him only to betray and to dishonour him? Had she blighted his life, branded him with the shame of a forsaken husband?

And then a hideous dread floated across her mind. What if that first wife were still living—divorced from him? Had she, Mildred Fausset, severely trained in the strictest principles of the Anglican Church—taught her creed by an ascetic who deemed divorce unchristian and an abomination, and who had always refused to marry those who had been divorced—had she, in whose life and mind religion and duty were as one feeling and one principle—had she been trapped into a union with a man whose wife yet lived, and in the sight of God was yet one with him—a wife who might crawl penitent to his feet some day, and claim him as her own again by the right of tears and prayers and a soul cleansed from sin? Such a sinner must have some hold, some claim even to the last, upon the man who once was her husband, who once swore to cherish her and cleave to her, of whom it had once been said, "And they two shall be one flesh."

No; again and again, no. She could not believe George Greswold capable of such deep dishonour as to have concealed the existence of a divorced wife.

No; the reason for that mysterious silence must be another reason than this.

She had sinned against him, it might be, and had died in her sin, under circumstances too sad to be told without infinite pain; and he, who had never in her experience shown himself wanting in moral courage, had in this one crisis of his life acted as the coward acts. He had kept silence where conscience should have constrained him to speak.

And then the wife's vivid fancy conjured up the image of that other wife. Her jealous fears depicted that wife of past years as a being to be loved and remembered until death — beautiful, fascinating, gifted with all the qualities that charm mankind. "He can never care for me as he once cared for her," Mildred told herself. "She was his first love."

His first—the first revelation of what love means to the passionate heart of youth. What a world there is in that! Mildred remembered how a new life began for her with the awakening of her love for George Greswold. What a strange sweet enchantment, what an intoxicating gladness which glorified

the whole face of nature! The river, and the reedy islets, and the pollard willows, and the autumn sunsets—things so simple and familiar—had all taken new colours in that magical dawn of her first love.

She—that unknown woman—had been George Greswold's first love. Mildred envied her that brief life, whose sole distinction was to have been loved by him.

"Why do I imagine a mystery about her?" she argued, after long brooding. "The only secret was that he loved her as he could never love me, and he feared to tell me as much lest I should refuse the remnant of a heart. It was out of kindness to me that he kept silence. It would have pained me too much to know how *she* had been loved."

She knew that her husband was a man of exceeding sensitiveness; she knew him capable of almost woman-like delicacy. Was it altogether unnatural that such a man should have held back the history of his first marriage—with its passionate love, its heartbroken ending—from the enthusiastic girl who had given him all her heart, and to whom he could give so little in return?

"He may have seen how I loved him, and may have married me half out of pity," she said to herself finally, with unspeakable bitterness.

Yet if this were so, could they have been so happy together, so completely united—save in that one secret of the past, that one dark regret which had revealed itself from time to time in an agonising dream? He had walked that dark labyrinth of sleep alone with his sorrow: there she could not follow him.

She remembered the awful sound of those broken sentences—spoken to shadows in a land of shadow. She remembered how acutely she had felt his remoteness as he sat up in bed, pale as death, his eyes open and fixed, his lips muttering. He and the dead were face to face in the halls of the past. *She* had no part in his life, or in his memory.

CHAPTER XII.

"SHE CANNOT BE UNWORTHY."

Mr. Castellani did not wait long before he availed himself of Mrs. Greswold's permission to repeat his visit. He appeared on Friday afternoon, at the orthodox hour of half-past three, when Mildred and her niece were sitting in the drawing-room, exhausted by a long morning at Salisbury, where they had explored the cathedral, and lunched in the Close with a clever friend of George Greswold's, who had made his mark on modern literature.

"I adore Salisbury Close," said Pamela, as she looked through the old-fashioned window to the old-fashioned garden; "it reminds me of Honoria."

She did not deem it necessary to explain what Honoria she meant, presuming a universal acquaintance with Coventry Patmore's gentle heroine.

The morning had been sultry, the homeward drive long, and both ladies were resting in comfort-

able silence, each with a book, when Castellani was announced.

Mildred received him rather coldly, trying her uttermost to seem thoroughly at ease. She introduced him to her niece, Miss Ransome.

"The daughter of the late Mr. Randolph Ransome and the sister of Lady Mountford?" Castellani inquired presently, when Pamela had run out on the lawn to speak to Box.

"Yes. You seem to know everybody's belongings."

"Why not? It is the duty of every man of the world, more especially of a foreigner. I know Mr. Ransome's place in the Sussex Weald—a very fine property—and I know that the two ladies are coheiresses, but that the Sussex estate is to descend to the eldest son of the elder daughter, or failing male issue there, to the son of the younger. Lady Mountford has a baby-son, I believe.

"Your information is altogether correct."

"Why should it be otherwise? Mr. Hillersdon and his wife discussed the family history to-day at luncheon, *apropos* to Miss Ransome's appearance in

Romsey Church at the Saint's Day service yesterday."

His frankness apologised for his impertinence, and he was a foreigner, which seems always to excuse a great deal.

Pamela came back again, after rescuing Box from a rough-and-tumble game with Kassandra. She looked rosy and breathless, and very pretty, in her pale-blue gown and girlish sash flying in the wind, and flaxen hair fluffed into a feathery pile on the top of her head, and honest brown eyes. She resumed her seat in the deep old window behind the end of the piano, and made believe to go on with some work, which she took in a tangled heap from a very untidy basket. Already Pamela had set the sign of her presence upon the drawing-rooms at Enderby, a trail of heterogeneous litter which was a part of her individuality. Screened by the piano, she was able to observe Castellani, as he stood leaning over the large central ottoman, with his knee on the cushioned seat, talking to Mrs. Greswold.

He was the author of *Nepenthe*. It was in that character he interested her. She looked at him with

the thought of his book full in her mind. It was one of those half-mad, wholly artificial compositions which delight girls and young men, and which are just clever enough, and have just enough originality to get talked about and written about by the cultured few. It was a love-story, ending tragically; a story of ruined lives and broken hearts, told in the autobiographical form, with a studied avoidance of all conventional ornament, which gave an air of reality where all was inherently false. Pamela thought it must be Castellani's own story. She fancied she could see the traces of those heart-breaking experiences, those crushing disappointments in his countenance, in his bearing even, and in the tones of his voice, which gave an impression of mental fatigue, as of a man worn out by a fatal passion.

The story of *Nepenthe* was as old as the hills—or at least as old as the Boulevard des Capucines and the Palais Royal. It was the story of a virtuous young man's love for an unvirtuous woman—the story of Demetrius and Lamia—the story of a man's demoralisation under the influence of incar-

nate falsehood, of the gradual lapse from good to evil, the gradual extinction of every belief and every scruple, the final destruction of a soul.

The wicked siren was taken, her victim was left; but left to expiate that miserable infatuation by an after-life of misery; left without a joy in the present or a hope in the future.

"He looks like it," thought Pamela, remembering that final chapter.

Mrs. Greswold was putting a few slow stitches into the azalea-leaves on her embroidery-frame, and listening to Mr. Castellani with an air of polite indifference.

"Do you know that Riverdale is quite the most delightful house I have ever stayed in?" he said; "and I have stayed in a great many. And do you know that Mrs. Hillersdon is heart-broken at your never having called upon her?"

"I am sorry so small a matter should touch Mrs. Hillersdon's heart."

"She feels it intensely. She told me so yesterday. Perfect candour is one of the charms of her character. She is as emotional and as trans-

parent as a child. Why have you not called on her?"

"You forget that Riverdale is seven miles from this house."

"Does not your charity extend so far? Are people who live seven miles off beyond the pale? I think you must visit a little further afield than seven miles. There must be some other reason."

"There is another reason, which I had rather not talk about."

"I understand. You consider Mrs. Hillersdon a person not to be visited. Long ago, when you were a child in the nursery, Mrs. Hillersdon was an undisciplined, inexperienced girl, and the world used her hardly. Is that old history never to be forgotten? Men, who know it all, have agreed to forget it: why should women, who only know a fragment, so obstinately remember?"

"I know nothing, and remember nothing, about Mrs. Hillersdon. My friends are, for the most part, those of my husband's choice, and I pay no visits without his approval. He does not wish me to visit

at Riverdale. You have forced me to give you a plain answer, Mr. Castellani."

"Why not? Plain truth is always best. I am sorry Mr. Greswold has interdicted my charming friend. You can have no idea how excellent a woman she is, or how admirable a wife. Tom Hillersdon might have searched the county from border to border and not have found as good a woman—looked at as the woman best calculated to make him happy. And what delightful people she has brought about him! One of the most interesting men I ever met arrived yesterday, and is to preach the hospital sermon at Romsey next Sunday. He is an old friend of yours."

"A clergyman, and an old friend of mine, at Riverdale!"

"A man of ascetic life and exceptional culture. I never heard any man talk of Dante better than he talked to me last night in a moonlight stroll on the terrace, while the other men were in the smoking-room."

"Surely you do not mean Mr. Cancellor, the Vicar of St. Elizabeth's, Parchment Street?"

"That is the man—Clement Cancellor, Vicar of St. Elizabeth's. He looks like a mediæval monk just stepped out of one of Bellini's altar-pieces."

"He is the noblest, most unselfish of men," said Mildred warmly; "he has given his life to doing good among rich and poor. It is so long since I have seen him. We have asked him to Enderby very often, but he has always been too busy to come. And to think that he should be in this neighbourhood and I know nothing about it; and to think that he should go to Riverdale rather than come here!"

"He had hardly any option. It was Mrs. Hillersdon who asked him to preach on Hospital Sunday. She extorted a promise from him three months ago in London. The Vicar of Romsey was enchanted. 'You are the cleverest woman I know,' he said. 'No one else could have got me such a great gun.'"

"A great gun—Mr. Cancellor a great gun! I can only think of him as I knew him when I was twelve years old: a tall, thin young man, in a very shabby coat—he was curate at St. Elizabeth's then—very gaunt and hollow-cheeked, but with such a

sweet smile. He used to come twice a week to teach me the history of the Bible and the Church. He made me love both."

"He is gaunt and hollow-cheeked still, tall and bony and sallow, and he still wears a shabby coat. You will not find much difference in him, I fancy—only so many more years of hard work and self-sacrifice, ascetic living and nightly study. A man to know Dante as he does must have given years of his life to that one poet—and I am told that in literature Cancellor is an all-round man. His monograph on Pascal is said to be the best of a brilliant series of such studies."

"I hope he will come to see his old pupil before he leaves the neighbourhood."

"He means to do so. He was talking of it yesterday evening—asking Mrs. Hillersdon if she was intimate with you—so awkward for poor Mrs. Hillersdon."

"I shall be very glad to see him again."

"May I drive him over to tea to-morrow afternoon?"

"He will be welcome here at any time."

"Or with any one? If Mrs. Hillersdon were to bring him, would you still refuse to receive her?"

"I have never refused to receive her. We have met and talked to each other on public occasions. If Mr. Cancellor likes her she cannot be unworthy."

"May she come with him to-morrow?" persisted Castellani.

"If she likes," faltered Mildred, wondering that any woman could so force an entrance to another woman's house.

She did not know that it was by such forced entrances Mrs. Hillersdon had made her way in society until some of the best houses in London had been opened to her.

"If you are not in a hurry to leave us, I know my niece would much like to hear you play," she said, feeling that the talk about Riverdale had been dull work for Pamela.

Miss Ransome murmured assent.

"If you will play something of Beethoven's," she entreated.

"Do you object to Mozart?" he asked, forgetting his depreciation of the valet-musician's son a

few days before. "I feel more in the humour for that prince of dramatists. I will give you the supper in *Don Giovanni*. You shall see Leporello trembling. You shall hear the tramp of ghostly feet."

And then, improvising upon a familiar theme, he gave his own version of that wonderful scene, and that music so played conjured up a picture as vivid as ever opera-house furnished to an enthralled audience.

Pamela listened in silent rapture. What a God-gifted creature this was, who had so deeply moved her by his pen, who moved her even more intensely by that magical touch upon the piano!

When he had played those last crashing chords which consigned the profligate to his doom, he waited for a minute or so, and then, softly, as if almost unawares, in mere absent-minded idleness, his hands wandered into the staccato accompaniment of the serenade, and, with the finest tenor Mildred had heard since she heard Sim Reeves, he sang those delicate and dainty phrases with which the seducer woos his last divinity.

He rose from the piano at the close of that lovely air, smiling at his hearers.

"I had no idea that you were a singer as well as a pianist," said Mildred.

"You forget that music is my native tongue. My father taught me to play before he taught me to read, and I knew harmony before I knew my alphabet. I was brought up in the house of a man who lived only for music—to whom all stringed instruments were as his mother tongue. It was by a caprice that he made me play the piano—which he rarely touched himself."

"He must have been a great genius," said Pamela, with girlish fervour.

"Alas! no, he just missed greatness, and he just missed genius. He was a highly-gifted man—various—capricious—volatile—and he married a woman with just enough money to ruin him. Had he been obliged to earn his bread, he might have been great. Who can say? Hunger is the slave-driver, with his whip of steel, who peoples the Valhalla of nations. If Homer had not been a beggar—as well as blind—we might have had no story

of Troy. Good-bye, Mrs. Greswold. Good-bye," shaking hands with Pamela. "I *may* bring my hostess to-morrow?"

"I—I—suppose so," Mildred answered feebly, wondering what her husband would think of such an invasion.

Yet, if Clement Cancellor, who to Mildred's mind had always seemed the ideal Christian priest, if he could tolerate and consort with her, could she, Mildred Greswold, persist in the Pharisee's part, and hold herself aloof from this neighbour, to whose good works and kindly disposition many voices had testified in her hearing?

CHAPTER XIII.

SHALL SHE BE LESS THAN ANOTHER?

It was in all good faith that Clement Cancellor had gone to Riverdale. He had not gone there for the fleshpots of Egypt. He was a man of severely ascetic habits, who ate and drank as temperately as a disciple of that old faith of the East which is gaining a curious influence upon our new life of the West. For him the gratification of the senses, soft raiment, artistic furniture, thoroughbred horses and luxurious carriages, palm-houses and orchid-houses, offered no temptation. He stayed in Mrs. Hillersdon's house because he was her friend, her friend upon the broadest and soundest basis on which friendship could be built. He knew all that was to be known about her. He knew her frailties of the past, her virtues in the present, her exalted hope in the future. From her own lips he had heard the story of Louise Lorraine's life. She had extenuated

nothing. She had not withheld from him either the foulness of her sins or their number—nay, it may be that she had in somewise exaggerated the blackness of those devils whom he, Clement Cancellor, had cast out from her, enhancing by just so much the magnitude of the miracle he had wrought. She had held back nothing; but over every revelation she had contrived to spread that gloss which a clever woman knows how to give to the tale of her own wrong-doing. In every incident of that evil career she had contrived to show herself more sinned against than sinning; the fragile victim of overmastering wickedness in others; the martyr of man's treachery and man's passion; the sport of fate and circumstance. Had Mr. Cancellor known the world he lived in half as well as he knew the world beyond he would hardly have believed so readily in the lady who had been Louise Lorraine: but he was too single-minded to doubt a repentant sinner whose conversion from the ways of evil had been made manifest by so many good works, and such unflagging zeal in the exercises of the Anglican Church.

Parchment Street, Grosvenor Square, is one of the fashionable streets of London, and St. Elizabeth's, Parchment Street, had gradually developed, in Clement Cancellor's incumbency, into one of the most popular tabernacles at the West End. He whose life-desire had been to carry the lamp of the faith into dark places, to be the friend and teacher of the friendless and the untaught, found himself almost in spite of himself a fashionable preacher, and the delight of the cultured, the wealthy, and the aristocratic. In his parish of St. Elizabeth's there was plenty of work for him to do—plenty of that work which he had chosen as the mission that had been given to him to fulfil. Behind those patrician streets where only the best-appointed carriages drew up, where only the best-dressed footmen ever pulled the bells or rattled long peals on high-art knockers, there were some of the worst slums in London, and it was in those slums that half Mr. Cancellor's life was spent. In narrow alleys between Oxford and Wigmore Streets, and in the intricate purlieus of Marylebone Lane, the Anglican priest had ample scope for his labour, a vineyard waiting for the hus-

bandman. And in the labyrinth hidden in the heart of West End London Mr. Cancellor's chief coadjutor for the last twenty years had been Louise Hillersdon. Thoroughness was the supreme quality of Mrs. Hillersdon's mind. Nothing stopped her. It was this temper which had given her distinction in the days when princes were her cupbearers and diamonds her daily tribute. There had been other women as beautiful, other women as fascinating; but there was not one who with beauty and fascination combined the audacity and resolution of Louise Lorraine. When Louise Lorraine took possession of a man's wits and a man's fortune that man was doomed. He was as completely gone as the lemon in the iron squeezer. A twist of the machine, and there is nothing left but broken rind and crushed pulp. A season of infatuation, and there was nothing left of Mrs. Lorraine's admirer but shattered health and an overdrawn banking account. Estates, houses, friends, position, good name, all dropped away from the man whom Louise Lorraine brayed in her mortar. She spoke of him next season with half contemptuous pity. "Did I know Sir Theodore

Barrymore? Yes; he used to come to my parties sometimes. A nice fellow enough, but such a terrible fool."

When Louise Lorraine married Tom Hillersdon, and took it into her head to break away altogether from her past career, and to pose before the world as a beautiful Magdalen, she was clever enough to know that, to achieve any place in society, she must have a very powerful influence to help her. She was clever enough to discover that the one influence which a woman in her position could count upon was the influence of the Church. She was beautiful enough and refined enough to win friends among the clergy by the charm of her personality. She was rich enough to secure such friends, and bind them to herself by the splendour of her gifts, by her substantial aid in those good works which are to the priest as the very breath of his life. One man she could win by an organ; another lived only to complete a steeple; the third had been yearning for a decade for that golden hour when the cracked tintinabulation which now summoned his flock should be exchanged for a fine peal of bells. Such men as

these were only too easily won, and the drawing-rooms of Mr. Hillersdon's house in Park Lane were rarely without the grace of some clerical figure in long frock-coat and Roman collar.

Clement Cancellor was of a sterner stuff, and not to be bought by bell or reredos, rood-screen or pulpit. Him Louise Hillersdon won by larger measures: to him she offered all that was spiritual in her nature: and this woman of strange memories was not without spiritual aspirations and real striving after godliness. Clement Cancellor was no pious simpleton, to be won by sentimental cant and crocodile tears. He knew truth from falsehood, had never in his life been duped by the jingle of false coin. He knew that Mrs. Hillersdon's repentance had the true ring, albeit she was in some things still of the earth earthy. She had worked for him and with him in that wilderness of London as not one other woman in his congregation had ever worked. To the lost of her own sex she had been as a redeeming angel. Wretched women had blessed her with their expiring breath, had died full of hopes that might never have been awakened had not Louise

Lorraine sat beside their beds. Few other women had ever so influenced the erring of her sex. She who had waded deep in the slough of sin knew how to talk to sinners.

Mr. Cancellor never forgot her as he had seen her by the bed of death and in the haunts of iniquity. She could never be to him as the herd of women. To the mind of the preacher she had a higher value than one in twenty of those women of his flock whose unstained lives had never needed the cleansing of self-sacrifice and difficult works.

Thus it was that the Vicar of St. Elizabeth's had never shrunk from acknowledging Mrs. Hillersdon as his personal friend, had never feared to sit at her board, or to be seen with her in public; and in the work of Louise Lorraine's rehabilitation Clement Cancellor had been a tower of strength. And now this latest mark of friendship, this visit to her country home, and this appearance in the noble old Abbey Church at her solicitation, filled her cup of pride. These starched county people who had shunned her hospitalities were to see that one of the most distinguished preachers in the High

Church party had given her his friendship and his esteem.

It had been something for her to have the Prince at Riverdale : it was still more to her to have Clement Cancellor.

Pamela was in a flutter of excitement all Saturday morning, in the expectation of Castellani's reappearance in the afternoon. She had heard Mr. Cancellor preach, and was delighted at the idea of seeing him in the pleasant intimacy of afternoon tea. Had there been no such person as Castellani, her spirits would have been on tip-toe at the idea of conversing with the fashionable preacher — of telling him in a reverent under-tone of all those deep emotions his eloquence had inspired in her. But the author of *Nepenthe* possessed just that combination of qualities which commands the admiration of such a girl as Pamela. That exquisite touch on the piano, that perfect tenor voice, that exotic elegance of dress and figure, all had made their mark upon the sensitive plate of a girl's ardent fancy. "If I had pictured to myself the man who

wrote *Nepenthe*, I should have imagined just such a face, just such a style," thought Pamela, quite forgetting that when first she had read the book she had made a very vivid picture of the author altogether the opposite of César Castellani—a dark man, lean as a whipping-post, grave as philosophy itself, with sombre black eyes, and ebon hair, and a complexion of antique marble. And now she was ready to accept the Italian, sleek, supple, essentially modern in every grace and attribute, in place of that sage of antique mould.

She went dancing about with the dogs all the morning, inciting the grave Kassandra to unwonted exertions, running in and out of the drawing-room, making an atmosphere of gaiety in the grave old house. Mildred's heart ached as she watched that flying figure in the white gown, youth, health, joyousness, personified.

"O, if my darling were but here, life might be full of happiness again," she thought. "I should cease to weary myself with wondering about that hidden past."

Do what she would her thoughts still dwelt upon

the image of that wife who had possessed George Greswold's heart before her. She knew that he must have loved that other woman whom he had sworn before God's altar to cherish. He was not the kind of man to marry for any motive but a disinterested love. That he had loved passionately, and that he had been wronged deeply, was Mildred's reading of the mystery. There had been a look of agony in his countenance when he spoke of the past that told of a sorrow too deep for words.

"He has never loved me as he once loved her," thought Mildred, who out of the wealth of her own love had developed the capacity for that self-torture called jealousy.

It seemed to her that her husband had taken pains to avoid the old opportunities of confidential talk since that revelation of last Sunday. He had been more than usually engaged by the business details of his estate; and she fancied that he made the most of all those duties which he used once to perform with the utmost despatch, grudging every hour that was spent away from the home circle. He now

complained of the new steward's ignorance, which threw so much extra work upon himself.

"After jogging on for years in the same groove with a man who knew every rood of my land, and the idiosyncrasies of every tenant, I find it hard work teaching a new man," he told his wife.

This sounded reasonable enough, yet she could but think that since Sunday he had studiously avoided being alone with her. If he asked her to drive or walk with him, he secured Pamela's company before the excursion was planned.

"We must show you the country," he said to his niece.

Mildred told him of the threatened incursion from Riverdale as they sat at luncheon with Pamela.

"I hope you don't mind my receiving Mrs. Hillersdon," she said.

"No, my dear Mildred, I think it would take a much worse woman than Mrs. Hillersdon to do you any harm, or Pamela either. Whatever her early history may have been, she has made Tom Hillersdon an excellent wife, and she has been a very good friend to the poor. I should not have cared for you to cul-

tivate Mrs. Hillersdon, or the society she brings round her, at Riverdale—"

"Sir Henry says they have people from the music-halls," interjected Pamela, in an awe-stricken voice.

"But if Mrs. Hillersdon likes to come here with her clerical star—"

"Don't call him a star, George. He is highly gifted, and people have chosen to make him the fashion, but he is the most single-hearted and simple-minded man I ever met. No popularity could spoil him. I feel that if he holds out the hand of friendship to Mrs. Hillersdon, she must be a good woman."

"Let her come, Mildred, only don't let her coming open the door to intimacy. I would not have my wife the friend of any woman with a history."

"And yet there are histories in most lives, George, and there is sometimes a mystery."

She could not refrain from this little touch of bitterness, yet she was sorry the instant she had spoken, deeply penitent, when she saw the look of pain in the thoughtful face opposite her. Why should she wilfully wound him, purposely, needlessly, she who so fondly loved him, whose keenest pain

was to think that he had loved any woman upon earth before he loved her ?

"Will you be at home to help me to receive my old friend, George ?" she said, as they rose from the table.

"Yes, I will be at home to welcome Cancellor, and to protect you from his *protégée's* influence, if I can."

They were all three in the drawing-room when the Riverdale party arrived. Mildred and Mrs. Hillersdon met in somewise as old acquaintances, having been thrown together on numerous occasions, at hunt balls, charity bazaars, and other public assemblies. Pamela was the only stranger.

Although the scandalous romance of Louise Lorraine's career was called ancient history, she was still a beautiful woman. The delicate features, the pure tones of the alabaster skin, and the large Irish gray eyes, had been kindly dealt with by time. On the verge of fifty, Mrs. Hillersdon might have owned only to forty, had she cared so far to palter with truth. Her charm was, however, now more in a fascinating personality than in the remains of a

once dazzling loveliness. There was mind in the keen, bright face, with its sharply-cut lines, and those traces of intellectual wear which give a new grace, instead of the old one of youthful softness and faultless colouring. The bloom was gone from the peach, the brilliancy of youth had faded from those speaking eyes, but there was all the old sweetness of expression which had made Louise Lorraine's smile irresistible as the song of the lurlei in the days that were gone. Her dress was perfect, as it had always been from the day when she threw away her last cotton stocking, darned by her own fair hands, and took to dressing like a leader of the great world, and with perhaps even less concern for cost. She dressed in perfect harmony with her age and position. Her gown was of softest black silk, draped with some semi-diaphanous fabric and clouded with Chantilly lace. Her bonnet was of the same lace and gauze, and her tapering hand and slender wrist were fitted to perfection in a long black glove which met a cloud of lace just below the elbow.

At a period when almost every woman who wore black glittered with beads and bugles from head to

foot, Mrs. Hillersdon's costume was unembellished by a single ornament. The Parisian milliner had known how to obey her orders to the letter when she stipulated—*surtout point de jais*—and the effect was at once distinguished and refined.

Clement Cancellor greeted his old pupil with warm friendliness, and meekly accepted her reproaches for all those invitations which he had refused in the past ten years.

"You told me so often that it was impossible for you to come to Enderby, and yet you can go to my neighbour," she said.

"My dear Mildred, I went to Riverdale because I was wanted at Romsey."

"And do you think you were not wanted at Romsey before to-day?—do you think we should not have been proud to have you preach in our church here? People would have flocked from far and wide to hear you—yes, even to Enderby Church—and you might have aided some good work, as you are going to do to-morrow. How clever of Mrs. Hillersdon to know how to tempt you down here!"

"You may be sure it is not the first time I have

tried, Mrs. Greswold," said that lady, with her fascinating smile. "Your influence would have gone further than mine, I daresay, had you taken half as much trouble as I have done."

Mr. Rollinson, the curate of Enderby, was announced at this moment. The Vicar was a rich man with another parish in his cure, and his own comfortable vicarage and his brother's family mansion being adjacent to the other church, Enderby saw him but seldom, whereby Mr. Rollinson was a person of much more weight in the parish than the average clerical subaltern. Mildred liked him for his plain-sailing Christianity and unfailing kindness to the poor, and she had asked him to tea this afternoon, knowing that he would like to meet Clement Cancellor.

Castellani looked curiously unlike those three other men, with their grave countenances and unstudied dress; George Greswold roughly clad in shooting jacket and knickerbockers; the two priests in well-worn black. The Italian made a spot of brightness in that sombre assembly, the sunlight touching his hair and moustache with glints of

gold, his brown velvet coat and light gray trousers suggestive of the studio rather than of rustic lanes, a gardenia in his button-hole, a valuable old intaglio fastening his white silk scarf, and withal a half-insolent look of amusement at those two priests and the sombre-visaged master of the house. He slipped with serpentine grace to the further side of the piano, where he contrived his first *tête-à-tête* with Pamela, comfortably sheltered by the great Henri Deux vase of gloxinias on the instrument.

Pamela was shy at first, and would hardly speak ; then taking courage, told him how she had wondered and wept over *Nepenthe*, and thereupon they began to talk as if they were two kindred souls that had been kept too long apart by adverse fate, and thrilled with the new delight of union.

Round the tea-table the conversation was of a graver cast. After a general discussion of the threatening clouds upon the political and ecclesiastical horizon, the talk had drifted to a question which at this time was uppermost in the minds of men. The Deceased Wife's Sister's Bill had been thrown out by the Upper House during the last session, and

everybody had been talking of that debate in which three princes of the blood royal had been attentive auditors. They had recorded their vote on the side of liberty of conscience, but in vain. Time-honoured prejudices had prevailed against modern enlightenment.

Clement Cancellor was a man who would have suffered martyrdom for his faith; he was generous, he was merciful, gentle, self-sacrificing, pure in spirit; but he was not liberal-minded. The old shackles hung heavily upon him. He could not love Wycliffe; and he could not forgive Cranmer. He was an ecclesiastic after the antique pattern. To him the marriage of a priest was a base paltering with the lusts of the flesh; and to him a layman's marriage with a dead wife's sister was unholy and abominable. He had been moved to indignation by the words that had been spoken and the pamphlets that had been written of late upon this question; and now, carried away by George Greswold's denunciation of that prejudiced majority by which the Bill had been rejected, Mr. Cancellor gave his indignation full vent, and forgot that he was speak-

ing in a lady's drawing-room, and before feminine hearers.

He spoke of such marriages as unholy and immoral, he spoke of such households as accursed. Mildred listened to him, and watched him wonderingly, scared at this unfamiliar aspect of his character. To her he had ever been the gentlest of teachers; she saw him now pallid with wrath—she heard him breathing words of fire.

George Greswold took up the glove, not because he had ever felt any particular interest in this question, but because he hated narrow-minded opinions and clerical prejudices.

"Why should the sister of his wife be different to a man from all other women?" he asked. "You may call her different—you may set her apart—you may say she must be to him as his own sister—her beauty must not touch him, the attractions that fascinate other men must have no influence over him. You may lay this down as a law—civil—canonical—what you will—but the common law of nature will override your clerical code, will burst your shackles of prejudice and tradition. Shall

Rachel be withheld from him who was true and loyal to Leah? She has dwelt in his house as his friend, the favourite and playmate of his children. He has respected her as he would have respected any other of his wife's girl-friends; but he has seen that she was fair; and if God takes the wife, and he, remembering the sweetness of that old friendship, and his children's love, turns to her as the one woman who can give him back his lost happiness—is he to be told that this one woman can never be his, because she was the sister of his first chosen? She has come out of the same stock whose loyalty he has proved, she would bring to his hearth all the old sweet associations—"

"And she would *not* bring him a second mother-in-law. What a stupendous superiority she would have *there!*" interjected the jovial Rollinson, who had been wallowing in hot-buttered cakes and strong tea, until his usually roseate visage had become startlingly rubicund.

He was in all things the opposite of the Vicar of St. Elizabeth's. He wrote poetry, made puns, played billiards, dined out at all the houses in the

neighbourhood that were worth dining at, and was only waiting to marry until Tom Hillersdon should be able to give him a living.

Mr. Cancellor reproved the ribald jester with a scathing look before he took up the argument against his host.

"If this Bill were to pass, no virtuous woman could live in the house of a married sister," he said.

"That is as much as to say that no honest woman can live in the house of any married man," retorted Greswold hotly. "Do you think if a man is weak enough to fall in love with another woman under his wife's roof he is less likely to sin because your canonical law stares him in the face, telling him, 'Thou canst never wed her'? The married man who is inconstant to his wife is not influenced by the chances of the future. He is either a bold, bad man, whose only thought is to win the woman whom he loves at any cost of honour or conscience; or he is a weak fool, who drifts hopelessly to destruction, and in whom the resolution of to-day yields to the temptation of to-morrow. Neither the bold sinner nor the weak one is influenced by the consideration

whether he can or cannot marry the woman he loves under the unlikely circumstance of his wife's untimely death. The man who does so calculate is the one man in so many thousands of men who will poison his wife to clear the way for his new fancy. I don't think we ought to legislate for poisoners. In plain words, if a married man is weak enough or wicked enough to be seduced by the charms of any woman who dwells beneath his roof, he will not be the less likely to fall because the law of the land has made that woman anathema maranatha, or because he has been warned from the pulpit that she is to be to him as his own flesh and blood, no dearer and no less dear than the sister beside whom he grew from infancy to manhood, and whom he has loved all his life, hardly knowing whether she is as beautiful as Hebe or as hideous as Tisyphone."

"You are a disciple of the New Learning, Mr. Greswold," Cancellor said bitterly; "the learning which breaks down all barriers and annihilates the Creator of all things—the learning which has degraded God from infinite power to infinitesimal insignificance, and which explains the genius of

Plato and Shakespeare, Luther and Newton, as the ultimate outcome of an unconscious primeval mist."

"I am no Darwinian," replied Greswold coldly, "but I would rather belong to his school of speculative inquiry than to the Calvinism which slew Servetus, or the Romanism which lit the death-pile of the Oxford martyrs."

Mildred was not more anxious than Mrs. Hillersdon to end a discussion which threatened angry feeling. They looked at each other in an agony, and then with a sudden inspiration Mildred exclaimed,

"If we could only persuade Mr. Castellani to play to us! We are growing so terribly serious;" and then she went to Clement Cancellor, who was standing by the open window, and took her place beside him, while Mrs. Hillersdon talked with Pamela and Castellani at the piano. "You know what a privilege it is to *me* always to hear you talk," she murmured in her sweet, subdued voice. "You know how I have followed your teaching in all things. And be assured my husband is no materialist. We

both cling to the old faith, the old hopes, the old promises. You must not misjudge him because of a single difference of opinion."

"Forgive me, my dear Mildred," replied Cancellor, touched by her submission. "I did wrong to be angry. I know that to many good Christians this question of marriage with a sister-in-law is a stumbling-block. I have taken the subject too deeply to heart perhaps—I, to whom marriage altogether seems outside the Christian priest's horizon. Perhaps I may exaggerate the peril of a wider liberty; but I, who look upon Henry VIII. as the arch-enemy of the one vital Church—of which he might have been the wise and enlightened reformer—I, who trace to his unhallowed union with his brother's widow all the after evils of his career—must needs lift up my voice against a threatened danger."

Castellani began Mendelssohn's "Wedding March" with a triumphant burst that sounded like mockery. Do what the preacher might to assimilate earth to heaven, here there would still be marrying and giving in marriage.

After the march Mildred went over to the piano and asked Castellani to sing.

He smiled assent, and played the brief symphony to a ballad of Heine's, set by Jensen. The exquisite tenor voice, the perfect taste of the singer, held his audience spellbound. They listened in silence, and entreated him to sing again, and then again, till he had sung four of these jewel-like ballads, and they felt that it was impertinence to ask for more.

Mildred had stolen round to her own sheltered corner, half hidden by a group of tall palms. She sat with her hands clasped in her lap, her head bent. She could not see the singer. She only heard the low pathetic voice, slightly veiled. It touched her like no other voice that she had ever heard since, in her girlhood, she burst into a passion of sobs at first hearing Sims Reeves, when that divine voice touched some hyper-sensitive chord in her own organisation and moved her almost to hysteria. And now, in this voice of the man who of all other men she instinctively disliked, the same tones touched the same chord, and loosened the floodgates of her tears. She sat with streaming eyes, grateful for the shel-

tering foliage which screened her from observation.

She dried her eyes and recovered herself with difficulty when the singer rose from the piano and Mrs. Hillersdon began to take leave. Mr. Rollinson button-holed Castellani on the instant.

"You sing as if you had just come from the seraphic choir," he said. "You must sing for us on the seventh."

"Who are 'us'?" asked Castellani.

"Our concert in aid of the fund for putting a Burne-Jones window over the altar."

"A concert in Enderby village? Is it to be given at the lock-up or in the pound?"

"It is to be given in this room. Mrs. Greswold has been good enough to allow us the use of her drawing-room and her piano. Miss Ransome promises to preside at the buffet for tea and coffee."

"It will be glorious fun," exclaimed Pamela; "I shall feel like a barmaid. I have always envied barmaids."

"Daudet says there is one effulgent spot in every man's life—one supreme moment when he

stands on the mountain-top of fortune and of bliss, and from which all the rest of his existence is a gradual descent. I wonder whether that afternoon will be your effulgent spot, Miss Ransome?" said Mrs. Hillersdon laughingly.

"It will—it must. To superintend two great urns of tea and coffee—*almost* as nice as those delicious beer-engines one sees at Salisbury Station—to charge people a shilling for a small cup of tea, and sixpence for a penny sponge-cake. What splendid fun!"

"Will you help us, Mr. Castleton?" asked the curate, who was not good at names.

"Mrs. Greswold has only to command me. I am in all things her slave."

"Then she will command you—she does command you," cried the curate.

"If you will be so very kind—" began Mildred.

"I am only too proud to obey you," answered Castellani, with more earnestness than the occasion required, drawing a little nearer to Mildred as he spoke; "only too glad of an excuse to return to this house."

Mildred looked at him with a half-frightened expression, and then glanced at Pamela. Did he mean mischief of some kind? Was this the beginning of an insidious pursuit of that frank girl, whose fortune was quite enough to tempt the casual adventurer?

"Of all men I have ever seen he is the last to whom I would entrust a girl's fate," thought Mildred, determined to be very much on her guard against the blandishments of César Castellani.

She took the very worst means to ward off danger. She made the direful mistake of warning the girl against the possible pursuer that very evening when they were sitting alone after dinner.

"He is a man I could never trust," she said.

"No more could I," replied Pamela; "but O, how exquisitely he sings!" and excited at the mere memory of that singing, she ran to the piano and began to pick out the melody of Heine's "Ich weiss nicht was soll es bedeuten," and sang the words softly in her girlish voice; and then slipped away from the piano with a nervous little laugh.

"Upon my word, Aunt Mildred, I am *traurig*

myself at the very thought of that exquisite song," she said. "What a gift it is to sing like that! How I wish *I* were César Castellani!"

"What, when we have both agreed that he is not a good man?"

"Who cares about being *good?*" exclaimed Pamela, beside herself; "three-fourths of the people of this world are good. But to be able to write a book that can unsettle every one's religion; to be able to make everybody miserable when one sings! Those are gifts that place a man on a level with the Greek gods. If I were Mr. Castellani I should feel like Mercury or Apollo."

"Pamela, you frighten me when you rave like that. Remember that, for all we know to the contrary, this man may be a mere adventurer, and in every way dangerous."

"Why should we think him an adventurer? He told me all about himself. He told me that his grandfather was under obligations to your grandfather. He told me about his father, the composer, who wrote operas which are known all over Italy, and who died young, like Mozart and Mendelssohn.

Genius is hereditary with him; he was suckled upon art. I have no doubt he is bad, irretrievably bad," said Pamela, with unction; "but don't try to persuade me that he is a vulgar adventurer who would try to borrow five-pound notes, or a fortune-hunter who would try to marry one for one's money," concluded the girl, falling back upon her favourite form of speech

CHAPTER XIV.

LIFTING THE CURTAIN.

The charity concert afforded César Castellani just the necessary excuse for going to Enderby Manor House as often as he liked, and for staying there as long as he liked. He was now on a familiar footing He drove or rode over from Riverdale nearly every day during the three weeks that intervened between Mr. Cancellor's sermon and the afternoon concert. He made himself the curate's right hand in all the details of the entertainment. He chose the music, he wrote the programme, he sent it to his favourite printer to be printed in antique type upon ribbed paper with ragged edges: a perfect gem in the way of a programme. He scoured the country round in quest of amateur talent, and was much more successful than the curate had been in the same quest.

"I'm astounded at your persuading Lady Mill-

borough to show in the daylight," said Rollinson, laughing. "You have the tongue of the serpent to overcome her objection to the glare of the afternoon sun."

"*Estote prudentes sicuti serpentes,*" said Castellani. "There's a fine old ecclesiastic's motto for you. I know Lady Millborough rather dreads the effect of sunlight upon her *nacre Bernhardt.* She told me that she was never equal to singing in the afternoon: the glare of the sun always gave her a headache. But I assured her in the first place that there should be no glare—that as an artist I abhorred a crude, white light—and that it should be my business to see that our concert-room was lighted upon purely æsthetic principles. We would have the dim religious light which painters and poets love. In the second place I assured her that she had as fine a contralto as Madame Alboni, on whose knees I had often sat as a child, and who gave me the emerald pin I was wearing."

"My hat, what a man you are!" exclaimed Rollinson. "But do you mean to say we are to give our concert in the dark?"

"We will not have the afternoon sun blinding

half our audience. We will have the auditorium in a cool twilight, and we will have lamplight on our platform—just that mellow and flattering light in which elderly women look young and young women angelic."

"We'll leave everything to you," cried the curate. "I think we ought to leave him free scope; ought we not, Mrs. Greswold?"

Mildred assented. Pamela was enthusiastic. This concert was to be one of the events of her life. Castellani had discovered that she possessed a charming mezzo-soprano. She was to sing a duet with him. O, what rapture! A duet of his own composition, all about roses and love and death.

> "'Twere sweet to die as the roses die,
> If I had but lived for thee;
> A life as long as the nightingale's song
> Were enough for my heart and me."

The words and the voices were interwoven in a melodious web; tenor and soprano entwined together —following and ever following like the phrases in an anthem.

The preparation of this one duet alone obliged

Mr. Castellani to be nearly every day at Enderby. A musician has inexhaustible patience in teaching his own music. Castellani hammered at every bar and every note with Pamela. He did not hesitate at unpleasant truth. She had received the most expensive instruction from a well-known singing-master, and, according to Castellani, everything she had been taught was wrong. "If you had been left alone to sing as the birds sing you would be ever so much better off," he said; "the man has murdered a very fine organ. If I had had the teaching of you, you would have sung as well as Trebelli by this time."

Pamela thrilled at the thought. O, to sing like some great singer—to be able to soar skyward on the wings of music—to sing as *he* sang! She had known him a fortnight by this time, and was deeply in love with him. In moments of confidence by the piano he called her Pamela, treating her almost as if she were a child, yet with a touch of gallantry always —an air that said, "You are beautiful, dear child, and you know it; but I have lived my life." Before Mrs. Greswold he was more formal, and called her Miss Ransome.

All barriers were down now between Riverdale and the Manor. Mrs. Hillersdon was going to make an extra large house-party on purpose to patronise the concert. It was to be on the 7th of September: the partridge-shooting would be in full swing, and the shooters assembled. Mrs. Greswold had been to tea at Riverdale. There seemed to be no help for it, and George Greswold was apparently indifferent.

"My dearest, your purity of mind will be in no danger from Mrs. Hillersdon. Even were she still Louise Lorraine, she could not harm you—and you know I am not given to consider the *qu'on dira t'on* in such a case. Let her come here by all means, so long as she is not obnoxious to you."

"She is far from that. I think she has the most delightful manners of any woman I ever met."

"So, no doubt, had Circe, yet she changed men into swine."

"Mr. Cancellor would not believe in her if she were not a good woman."

"I should set a higher value on Cancellor's opinion if he were more of a man of the world, and

less of a bigot. See what nonsense he talked about the Deceased Wife's Sister's Bill."

"Nonsense! O, George, if you knew how it distressed me to hear you take the other side—the unchristian side!"

"I can find no word of Christ's against such marriages, and the Church of old was always ready with a dispensation for any such union, if it was made worth the Church's while to be indulgent. It was the earnest desire of the Roman Catholic world that Philip should marry Elizabeth. You are Cancellor's pupil, Mildred, and I cannot wonder if he has made you something of a bigot."

"He is the noblest and most unselfish of men."

"I admit his unselfishness—the purity of his intentions—the tenderness of his heart; but I deny his nobility. Ecclesiastic narrow-mindedness spoils a character that might have been perfect had it been less hampered by tradition. Cancellor is a couple of centuries behind the time. His Church is the Church of Laud."

"I thought you admired and loved him, George," said Mildred regretfully.

"I admire his good qualities, I love him for his thoroughness; but our creeds are wide apart. I cannot even pretend to think as he thinks."

This confession increased Mildred's sadness. She would have had her husband think as she thought, believe as she believed, in all spiritual things. The beloved child they had lost was waiting for them in heaven; and she would fain that they should both tread the same path to that better world where there would be no more tears, no more death—where day and night would be alike in the light of the great Throne. She shuddered at the thought of any difference of creed on her husband's part, shuddered at that beginning of divergence which might end in infidelity. She had been educated by Clement Cancellor, and she thought as he thought. It seemed to her that she was surrounded by an atmosphere of doubt. In the books she read, among the more cultivated people whom she met, she found the same tendency to speculative infidelity, pessimism, Darwinism, sociology, Pantheism, anything but Christian belief. The nearest approach to religious feeling seemed to be found in the theosophists, with

their last fashionable Oriental improvements upon the teaching of Christ.

Clement Cancellor had trained her in the belief that there was one Church, one creed, one sovereign rule of life, outside which rigid boundary-line lay the dominion of Satan. And now, seeing her husband's antagonism to her pastor upon this minor point of the marriage law, she began to ask herself whether those two might not stand as widely apart upon graver questions—whether George Greswold might not be one of those half-hearted Christians who attend their parish church and keep Sunday sacred because it is well to set a good example to their neighbours and dependants, while their own faith is little more than a memory of youthful beliefs, the fading reflection of a sun that has sunk below the horizon.

She had discovered her husband capable of a suppression of truth that was almost as bad as falsehood; and now having begun to doubt his conscientiousness, it was not unnatural that she should begin to doubt his religious feeling.

"Had he been as deeply religious as I thought him, he would not have so deceived me," she told

herself, still brooding upon that mystery of his first marriage.

Castellani's presence in the house was a continual irritation to her. It tortured her to think that he knew more of her husband's past life than was known to her. She longed to question him, yet refrained, feeling that there would be unspeakable meanness, treachery even, in obtaining any information about her husband's past life except from his own lips. He had chosen to keep silence, he who could so easily have explained all things; and it was her duty to submit

She tried to be interested in the concert, which involved a good deal of work for herself, as she was to play all the accompaniments, the piano part in a concertante duet by De Bériot with an amateur violin player, and a Hungarian march by a modern classic by way of overture. There were rehearsals nearly every day, with much talk and tea-drinking. Enderby Manor seemed given over to bustle and gaiety—that grave old house, which to her mind ought to have been silent as a sepulchre, now that Lola's voice could sound there never more, except in dreams.

"People must think I am forgetting her," she said to herself with a sigh, when half-a-dozen carriages had driven away from the door, after two hours of bustle and confusion, much discussion as to the choice of songs and the arrangement of the programme, which everybody wanted different.

"I cannot possibly sing 'The Three Fishers' after Captain Scobell's 'Wanderer,'" protested Lady Millborough. "It would never do to have two dismal songs in succession."

Yet when it was proposed that her ladyship's song should succeed Mr. Rollinson's admirable rendering of George Grossmith's "He was such a Careless Man," she distinctly refused to sing immediately after a comic song.

"I am not going to take the taste of Mr. Rollinson's vulgarity out of people's mouths," she told Mildred, in an audible aside.

To these God-gifted vocalists the accompanist was as an inferior being, a person with a mere mechanical gift of playing anything set before her with taste and style. They treated her as if she had been a machine

"If you wouldn't mind going over our duet just once more, I think we should feel more comfortable in it," said one of the two Miss Tadcasters, who were to take the roof off, metaphorically, in the Norma duet.

Mildred toiled with unwavering good-nature, and suppressed her shudders at many a false note, and cast oil on the waters when the singers were inclined to quarrel. She was glad of the drudgery that kept her fingers and her mind occupied; she was glad of any distraction that changed the current of her thoughts.

It was the day before the concert. César Castellani had established himself as *l'ami de la maison*, a person who had the right to come in and out as he liked, whose coming and going made no difference to the master of the house. Had George Greswold's mind been less abstracted from the business of everyday life he might have seen danger to Pamela Ransome's peace of mind in the frequent presence of the Italian, and he might have considered it his duty, as the young lady's kinsman, to have

restricted Mr. Castellani's privileges. But the blow which had crushed George Greswold's heart a little more than a year ago had left him in somewise a broken man. He had lost all interest in the common joys and occupations of every-day life. His days were spent for the most part in long walks or rides in the loneliest places he could find, his only evening amusement was found in books, and those books of a kind which engrossed his attention and took him out of himself. His wife's companionship was always precious to him; but their intercourse had lost all its old gaiety and much of the old familiarity. There was an indefinable something which held them asunder even when they were sitting in the same room, or pacing side by side, just as of old, upon the lawn in front of the drawing-room, or idling in their summer parlour in the shade of the cedars.

Again and again in the last three weeks some question about the past had trembled upon Mildred's lips as she sat at work by the piano where Castellani played in dreamy idleness, wandering from one master to another, or extemporising after his own

capricious fancies. Again and again she had struggled against the temptation and had conquered. No, she would not stoop to a meanness. She would not be disloyal to her husband by so much as one idle question.

To-day Castellani was in high spirits, proud of to-morrow's anticipated success, in which his own exertions would count for much. He sat at the piano in a leisure hour after tea. All the performers had gone, after the final adjustment of every detail. Mildred sat idle with her head resting against the cushion of a high-backed armchair, exhausted by the afternoon's labours. Pamela stood by the piano watching and listening delightedly as Castellani improvised.

"I will give you my musical transcript of St. Partridge Day," he said, smiling down at the notes as he played a lively melody with little rippling runs in the treble and crisp staccato chords in the bass. "This is morning, and all the shooters are on tiptoe with delight—a misty morning," gliding into a dreamy legato movement as he spoke. "You can scarcely see the hills yonder, and the sun is not yet

up. See there he leaps above that bank of purple cloud, and all is brightness," changing to crashing chords in the bass and brilliant arpeggios in the treble. "Hark! there is chanticleer. How shrill he peals in the morning air! The dogs are leaving the kennel—and now the gates are open, dogs and men are in the road. You can hear the steady tramp of the clumsy shooting-boots—your dreadful English boots—and the merry music of the dogs. Pointers, setters, spaniels, smooth beasts and curly beasts, shaking the dew from the hedgerows as they scramble along the banks, flying over the ditches—creatures of lightning swiftness; yes, even those fat heavy spaniels which seem made to sprawl and snap at flies in the sunshine or snore beside the fire."

He talked in brief snatches, playing all the time—playing with the easy brilliancy, the unerring grace of one to whom music is a native tongue—as natural a mode of thought-expression as speech itself. His father had trained him to improvise, weaving reminiscences of all his favourite composers into those dreamy reveries. They had sat side by side, father and son, each following the bent of his

own fancy, yet quick to adapt it to the other, now leading, now following. They had played together as Moscheles and Mendelssohn used to play, delighting in each other's caprices.

"I hope I don't bore you very much," said Castellani, looking up at Mildred as she sat silent, the fair face and pale gold hair defined against the olive brocade of the chair cushion.

He looked up at her in wondering admiration, as at a beautiful picture. How lovely she was, with a loveliness that grew upon him, and took possession of his fancy and his senses with a strengthening hold day by day. It was a melancholy loveliness, the beauty of a woman whose life had come to a dead stop, in whose breast hope and love were dead—or dormant.

"Not dead," he told himself, "only sleeping. Whose shall be the spell to awaken the sleeper Who shall be the Orpheus to bring this sweet Eurydice from the realms of Death?"

Such thoughts were in his mind as he sat looking at her, waiting for her answer, playing all the while, telling her how fair she was in the tenderest

variations of an old German air whose every note breathed passionate love.

"How sweet!" murmured Pamela; "what an exquisite melody!" taking some of the sweetness to herself. "How could such sweetness weary any one with the ghost of an ear? You are not bored by it, are you, aunt?"

"Bored? no, it is delightful," answered Mildred, rousing herself from a reverie. "My thoughts went back to my childhood while you were playing. I never knew but one other person who had that gift of improvisation, and she used to play to me when I was a child. She was almost a child herself, and of course she was very inferior to you as a pianist; but she would sit and play to me for an hour in the twilight, inventing new melodies, or playing recollections of old melodies, describing in music. The old fairy tales are for ever associated with music in my mind, because of those memories. I believe she was highly gifted in music."

"Music of a high order is not an uncommon gift among women of sensitive temperament," said Castellani musingly. "I take it to be only another

name for sympathy. Want of musical feeling is want of sympathy. Shakespeare knew that when he declared the non-musical man to be by nature a villain. I could no more imagine *you* without the gift of music than I could imagine the stars without the quality of light. Mr. Greswold's first wife was a good musician, as no doubt you know."

"You heard her play—and sing?" faltered Mildred, avoiding a direct reply.

The sudden mention of her dead rival's name had quickened the beating of her heart. She had longed to question him and had refrained; and now, without any act of hers, he had spoken, and she was going to hear something about that woman whose existence was a mystery to her, whose Christian name she had never heard.

"Yes, I heard her several times at parties at Nice. She was much admired for her musical talents. She was not a grand singer, but she had been well taught, and she had exquisite taste, and knew exactly the kind of music that suited her best. She was one of the attractions at the Palais Montano, where one heard only the best music."

"I think you said the other day that you did not meet her often," said Mildred. "My husband could hardly have forgotten you had you met frequently."

"I can scarcely say that we met frequently, and our meetings were such as Mr. Greswold would not be very likely to remember. I am not a remarkable man now, and I was a very insignificant person fifteen years ago. I was only asked to people's houses because I could sing a little, and because my father had a reputation in the South as a composer. I was never introduced to your husband, but I was presented to his wife—as a precocious youth with some pretensions to a tenor voice—and I found her very charming—after her own particular style."

"Was she a beautiful woman?" asked Mildred. "I—I—have never talked about her to my husband, she died so young, and—"

"Yes, yes, I understand," interrupted Castellani, as she hesitated. "Of course you would not speak of her. There are things that cannot be spoken about. There is always a skeleton in every life—not more in Mr. Greswold's past than in that of

other people, perhaps, could we know all histories. I was wrong to speak of her. Her name escaped me unawares."

"Pray don't apologise," said Mildred, indignant at something in his tone, which hinted at wrong-doing on her husband's part. "There can be no reason why you should keep silence—to me; though any mention of an old sorrow might wound him. I know my husband too well not to know that he must have behaved honourably in every relation of life—before I married him as well as afterwards. I only asked a very simple question: was my predecessor as beautiful as she was gifted?"

"No. She was charming, piquant, elegant, spirituelle, but she was not handsome. I think she was conscious of that want of beauty, and that it made her sensitive, and even bitter. I have heard her say hard things of women who were handsomer than herself. She had a scathing tongue and a capricious temper, and she was not a favourite with her own sex, though she was very much admired by clever men. I know that as a lad I thought her one of the brightest women I had ever met."

"It was sad that she should die so young," said Mildred.

She would not for worlds that this man should know the extent of her ignorance about the woman who had borne her husband's name. She spoke vaguely, hoping that he would take it for granted she knew all.

"Yes," assented Castellani with a sigh, "her death was infinitely sad."

He spoke as of an event of more than common sadness — a calamity that had been in somewise more tragical than untimely death must needs be.

Mildred kept silence, though her heart ached with shapeless forebodings, and though it would have been an unspeakable relief to know the worst rather than to feel the oppression of this mystery.

Castellani rose to take leave. He was paler than he had been before the conversation began, and he had a troubled air. Pamela looked at him with sympathetic distress. "I am afraid you are dreadfully tired," she said, as they shook hands.

"I am never tired in this house," he answered;

and Pamela appropriated the compliment by her vivid blush.

Mildred shook hands with him mechanically and in silence. She was hardly conscious of his leaving the room. She rose and went out into the garden, while Pamela sat down to the piano and began singing her part in the everlasting duet. She never sang anything else nowadays. It was a perpetual carol of admiration for the author of *Nepenthe*.

> "'Twere sweet to die as the roses die,
> If I had but lived for thee;
> 'Twere sweet to fade as the twilight fades
> Over the western sea,"

she warbled, while Mildred paced slowly to and fro in front of the cedars, brooding over every word Castellani had spoken about her husband's first wife.

"Her death was infinitely sad."

Why infinitely? The significance of the word troubled her. It conjured up all manner of possibilities. Why infinitely sad? All death is sad. The death of the young especially so. But to say even of a young wife's death that it was infinitely sad would seem to lift it out of the region of humanity's

common doom. That qualifying word hinted at a tragical fate rather than a young life cut short by any ordinary malady. There had been something in Castellani's manner which accentuated the meaning of his words. That troubled look, that deep sigh, that hurried departure, all hinted at a painful story which he knew and did not wish to reveal.

He had in a manner apologised for speaking of George Greswold's first wife. There must have been a reason for that. He was not a man to say meaningless things out of *gaucherie;* not a man to blunder and equivocate from either shyness or stupidity. He had implied that Mr. Greswold was not likely to talk about his first marriage—that he would naturally avoid any allusion to his first wife.

Why naturally? Why should he not speak of that past life? Men are not ordinarily reticent upon such subjects. And that a man should suppress the fact of a first marriage altogether would suggest memories so dark as to impel an honourable man to stoop to a tacit lie rather than face the horror of revelation.

She walked up and down that fair stretch of

velvet turf upon which her feet had trodden so lightly in the happy years that were gone—gone never to be recalled, as it seemed to her, carrying with them all that she had ever known of domestic peace, of wedded bliss. Never again could they two be as they had been. The mystery of the past had risen up between them—like some hooded phantom, a vaguely threatening figure, a hidden face—to hold them apart for evermore.

"If he had only trusted me," she thought despairingly, "there is hardly any sin that I would not have forgiven for love of him. Why could he not believe in my love well enough to know that I should judge him leniently — if there had been wrong-doing on his side—if—if—"

She had puzzled over that hidden past, trying to penetrate the darkness, imagining the things that might have happened—infidelity on the wife's part — infidelity on the husband's side — another and fatal attachment taking the place of loyal love. Sin of some kind there must have been, she thought; for such dark memories could scarcely be sinless. But was husband or wife the sinner?

"Her death was infinitely sad."

That sentence stood out against the dark background of mystery as if written in fire. That one fact was absolute. George Greswold's first wife had died under circumstances of peculiar sadness; so painful that Castellani's countenance grew pale and troubled at the very thought of her death.

"I cannot endure it," Mildred thought at last, in an agony of doubt. "I will not suffer this torture for another day. I will appeal to him. I will question him. If he values my love and my esteem he will answer faithfully. It must be painful for him, painful for me; but it will be far better for us both in the long-run. Anything will be better than these torturing fears. I am his wife, and I have a right to know the truth."

The dressing-gong summoned her back to the house. Her husband was in the drawing-room half-an-hour afterwards, when she went down to dinner. He was still in his jacket and knickerbockers, just as he had come in from a long ramble.

"Will you forgive me if I dine with you in these clothes, Mildred, and you, Pamela?" to the damsel

in white muslin, whom he had just surprised at the piano still warbling her honeyed strain about death and the roses; "I came in five minutes ago—dead beat. I have been in the forest, and had a tramp with the deerhounds over Bramble Hill."

"You walk too far, George. You are looking dreadfully tired."

"I'm sure you needn't apologise for your dress on my account," said Pamela. "Henry is a perfect disgrace half his time. He hates evening-clothes, and I sometimes fear he hates soap-and-water. He can reconcile his conscience to any amount of dirt so long as he has his cold tub in the morning. He thinks that one sacrifice to decency justifies anything. I have had to sit next him at dinner when he came straight from rats," concluded Pamela, with a shudder. "But Rosalind is so foolishly indulgent. She would spoil twenty husbands."

"And you, I suppose, would be a martinet to one?" said Greswold, smiling at the girl's animated face.

"It would depend. If I were married to an artist I could forgive any neglect of the proprieties.

One does not expect a man of that kind to be the slave of conventionalities; but a commonplace person like Sir Henry Mountford has nothing to recommend him but his tailor."

They went to dinner, and Pamela's prattle relieved the gloom which had fallen upon husband and wife. George Greswold saw that there were signs of a new trouble in his wife's face. He sat for nearly an hour alone with the untouched decanters before him, and with Kassandra's head upon his knee. The dog always knew when his thoughts were darkest, and would not be repulsed at such times. She was not obtrusive: she only wanted to bear him company.

It was nearly ten o'clock when he left the dining-room. He looked in at the drawing-room door, and saw his wife and his niece sitting at work, silent both.

"I am going to the library to write some letters, Mildred," he said: "don't sit up for me."

She rose quickly and went over to him.

"Let me have half-an-hour's talk with you first, George," she said, in an earnest voice: "I want so much to speak to you."

"My dearest, I am always at your service," he answered quietly; and they went across the hall together, to that fine old room which was essentially the domain of the master of the house.

It was a large room with three long narrow windows—unaltered from the days of Queen Anne—looking out to the carriage-drive in the front of the house, and the walls were lined with books, in severely architectural bookcases. There was a lofty marble chimneypiece, richly decorated, and in front of the fireplace there was an old-fashioned knee-hole desk, at which Mr. Greswold was wont to sit. There was a double reading-lamp ready-lighted for him upon this desk, and there was no other light in the room. By this dim light the sombre colouring of oak bookcases and maroon velvet window-curtains deepened to black. The spacious room had almost a funereal aspect, like that awful banqueting-hall to which Domitian invited his parasites and straightway frightened them to death.

"Well, Mildred, what is the matter?" asked Greswold, when his wife had seated herself beside him in front of the massive oak desk at which all

the business of his estate had been transacted since he came to Enderby. "There is nothing amiss, love, I hope, to make you so earnest?"

"There is something very much amiss, George," she answered. "Forgive me if I pain you by what I have to say—by the questions I am going to ask. I cannot help giving you pain, truly and dearly as I love you. I cannot go on suffering as I have suffered since that wretched Sunday afternoon when I discovered how you had deceived me—you whom I so trusted, so honoured as the most upright among men."

"It is a little hard that you should say I deceived you, Mildred. I suppressed one fact which had no bearing upon my relations with you."

"You must have signed your name to a falsehood in the register, if you described yourself as a bachelor."

"I did not so describe myself. I confided the fact of my first marriage to your father on the eve of our wedding. I told him why I had been silent—told him that my past life had been steeped in bitterness. He was generous enough to accept

my confidence and to ask no questions. My bride was too shy and too agitated to observe what I wrote in the register, or else she might have noted the word 'widower' after my name."

"Thank God you did not sign your name to a lie," said Mildred, with a sigh of relief.

"I am sorry my wife of fourteen years should think me capable of falsehood on the document that sealed my fate with hers."

"O, George, I know how true you are—how true and upright you have been in every word and act of your life since we two have been one. It is not in my nature to misjudge you. I *cannot* think you capable of wrong-doing to any one under strongest temptation. I cannot believe that Fate could set such a snare for you as could entrap you into one dishonourable act; but I am tortured by the thought of a past life of which I know nothing. Why did you hide your marriage from me when we were lovers? Why are you silent and secret now, when I am your wife, the other half of yourself, ready to sympathise with you, to share the burden of dark memories? Trust me, George. Trust me,

dear love, and let us be again as we have been, united in every thought."

"You do not know what you are asking me, Mildred," said George Greswold, in his deep, grave voice, looking at her with haggard reproachful eyes. "You cannot measure the torture you are inflicting by this aimless curiosity."

"You cannot measure the agony of doubt which I have suffered since I knew that you loved another woman before you loved me—loved her so well that you cannot bear even to speak of that past life which you lived with her—regret her so intensely that now, after fourteen years of wedded life with me, the mere memory of that lost love can plunge you into gloom and despair," said Mildred passionately.

That smothered fire of jealousy which had been smouldering in her breast for weeks broke out all at once in impetuous speech. She no longer cared what she said. Her only thought was that the dead love had been dearer than the living, that she had been cozened by a lover whose heart had never been wholly hers.

"You are very cruel, Mildred," her husband answered quietly. "You are probing an old wound, and a deep one, to the quick. You wrong yourself more than you wrong me by causeless jealousy and unworthy doubts. Yes, I did conceal the fact of my first marriage—not because I had loved my wife too well, but because I had not loved her well enough. I was silent about a period of my life which was one of intense misery—which it was my duty to myself to forget, if it were possible to forget—which it was perilous to remember. My only chance of happiness—or peace of mind—lay in oblivion of that bitter time. It was only when I loved you that I began to believe forgetfulness was possible. I courted oblivion by every means in my power. I told myself that the man who had so suffered was a man who had ceased to exist. George Ransome was dead. George Greswold stood on the threshold of a new life, with infinite capacities for happiness. I told myself that I might be a beloved and honoured husband—which I had never been—a useful member of society—which I had not been hitherto. Until that hour all things had been

against me. With you for my wife all things would be in my favour. For thirteen happy years this promise of our marriage morning was fully realised; then came our child's death; and now comes your estrangement."

"I am not estranged, George. It is only my dread of the beginning of estrangement which tortures me. Since that man spoke of your first wife, I have brooded perpetually upon that hidden past. It is weak, I know, to have done so. I ought to trust unquestioningly: but I cannot, I cannot. I love you too well to love without jealousy."

"Well, let the veil be lifted then, since it must be so. Ask what questions you please, and I will answer them—as best I can."

"You are very good," she faltered, drawing a little nearer to him, leaning her head against his shoulder as she talked to him, and laying her hand on his as it lay before him on the desk, tightly clenched. "Tell me, dear, were you happy with your first wife?"

"I was not."

"Not even in the beginning?"

"Hardly in the beginning. It was an ill-advised union, the result of impulse."

"But she loved you very dearly, perhaps."

"She loved me—dearly—after her manner of loving."

"And you did not love her?"

"It is a cruel thing you force me to say, Mildred. No, I did not love her."

"Had you been married long when she died?"

She felt a quivering movement in the clenched hand on which her own lay caressingly, and she heard him draw a long and deep breath.

"About a year."

"Her death was a sad one, I know. Did she go out of her mind before she died?"

"No."

"Did she leave you—or do you any great wrong?"

"No."

"Were you false to her, George—O, forgive me, forgive me—but there must have been something more sad than common sadness, and it might be that some new and fatal love—"

"There was no such thing," he answered sternly.

"I was true to my duties as a husband. It was not a long trial—only a year. Even a profligate might keep faith for so short a span."

"I see you will not confide in me. I will ask no more questions, George. That kind of catechism will not make us more in sympathy with each other. I will ask you nothing more — except — just one question — a woman's question. Was your first wife beautiful in your eyes."

"She was not beautiful; but she was intellectual, and she had an interesting countenance—a face that attracted me at first sight. It was even more attractive to me than the faces of handsomer women. But if you want to know what your fancied rival was like you need not languish in ignorance," with some touch of scorn. "I have her photograph in this desk. I have kept it for my days of humiliation, to remind me of what I have been and what I may be again. Would you like to see it?"

"Yes, George, if it will not pain you too much to show it to me."

"Do not talk of pain. You have stirred the waters of Marah so deeply that one more bitter drop

cannot signify." He unlocked his desk as he spoke, lifted the lid, which was sustained by a movable upright, and groped among the accumulation of papers and parchments inside.

The object for which he was seeking was at the back of the desk, under all the papers. He found it by touch: a morocco case containing a cabinet photograph. Mildred stood up beside him, with one hand on his shoulder as he searched.

He handed her the case without a word. She opened it in silence and looked at the portrait within. A small, delicately-featured face, with large dark eyes—eyes almost too large for the face—a slender throat, thin sloping shoulders—eyes that looked out of the picture with a strange intensity—a curious alertness in the countenance, as of a woman made up of nerves and emotions, a nature wanting the element of repose.

Mildred stared at the picture three or four seconds, and then with a choking sound like a strangled sob fell unconscious at her husband's feet.

END OF VOL. I.